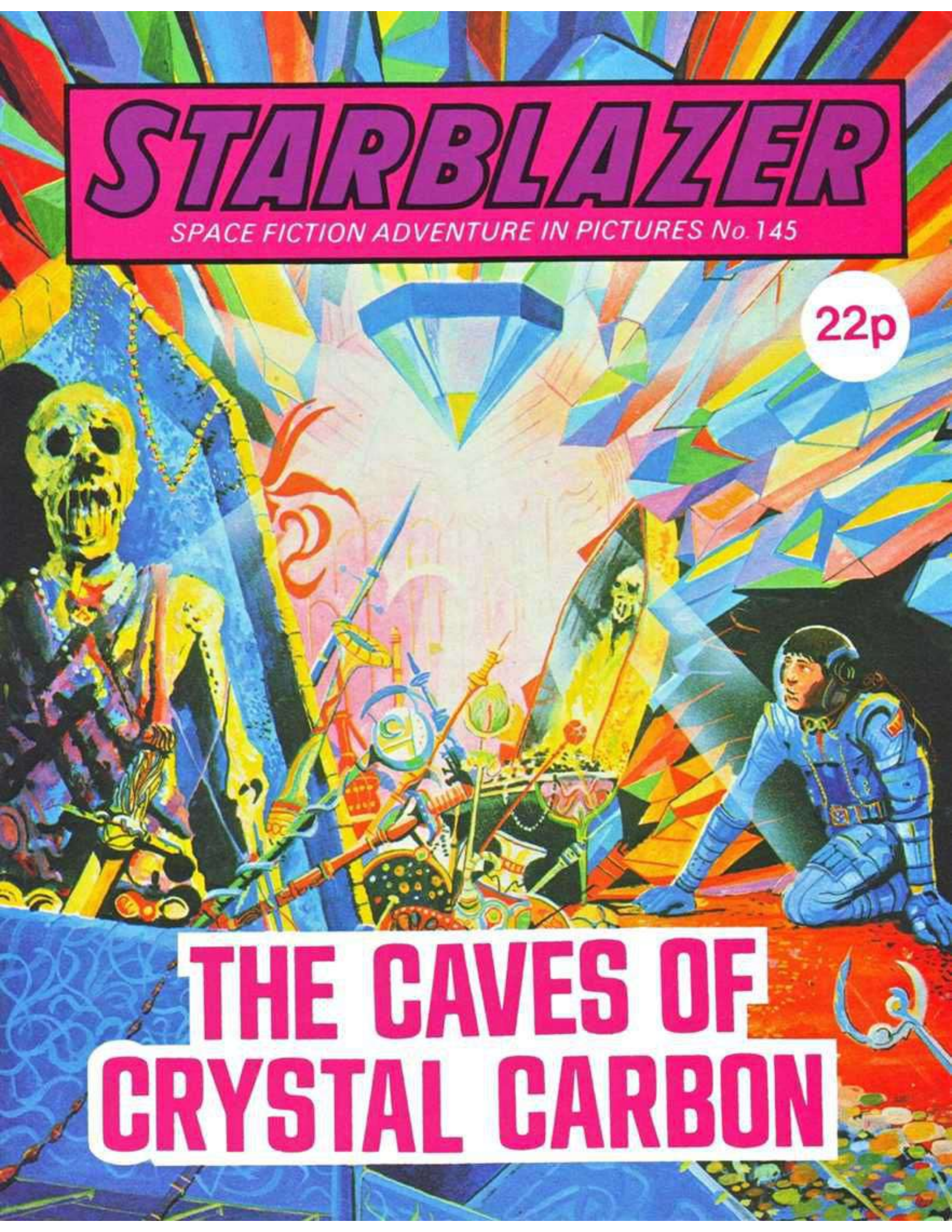
STARBLAZER

SPACE FICTION ADVENTURE IN PICTURES No. 145

22p



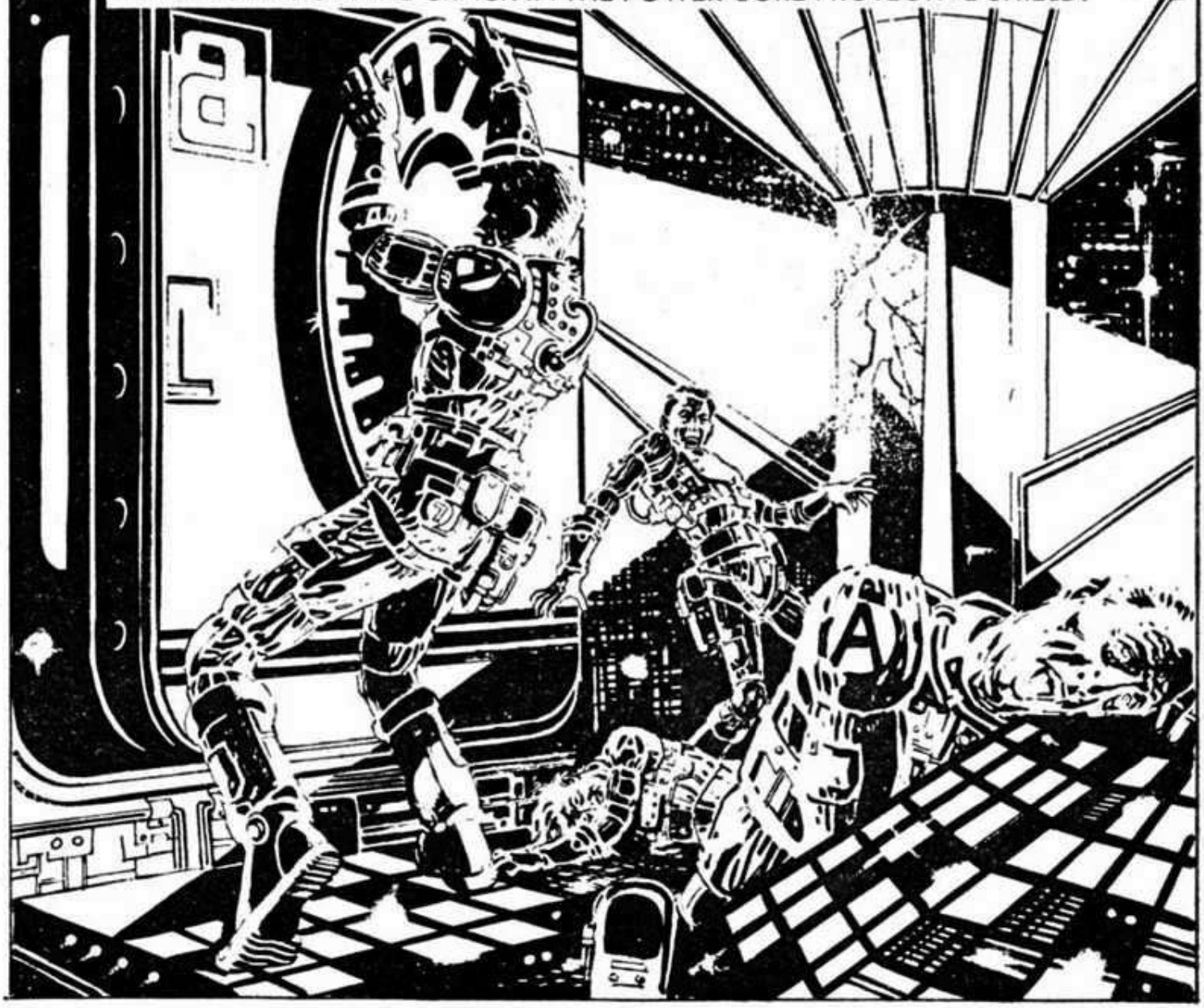
THE CAVES OF CRYSTAL CARBON

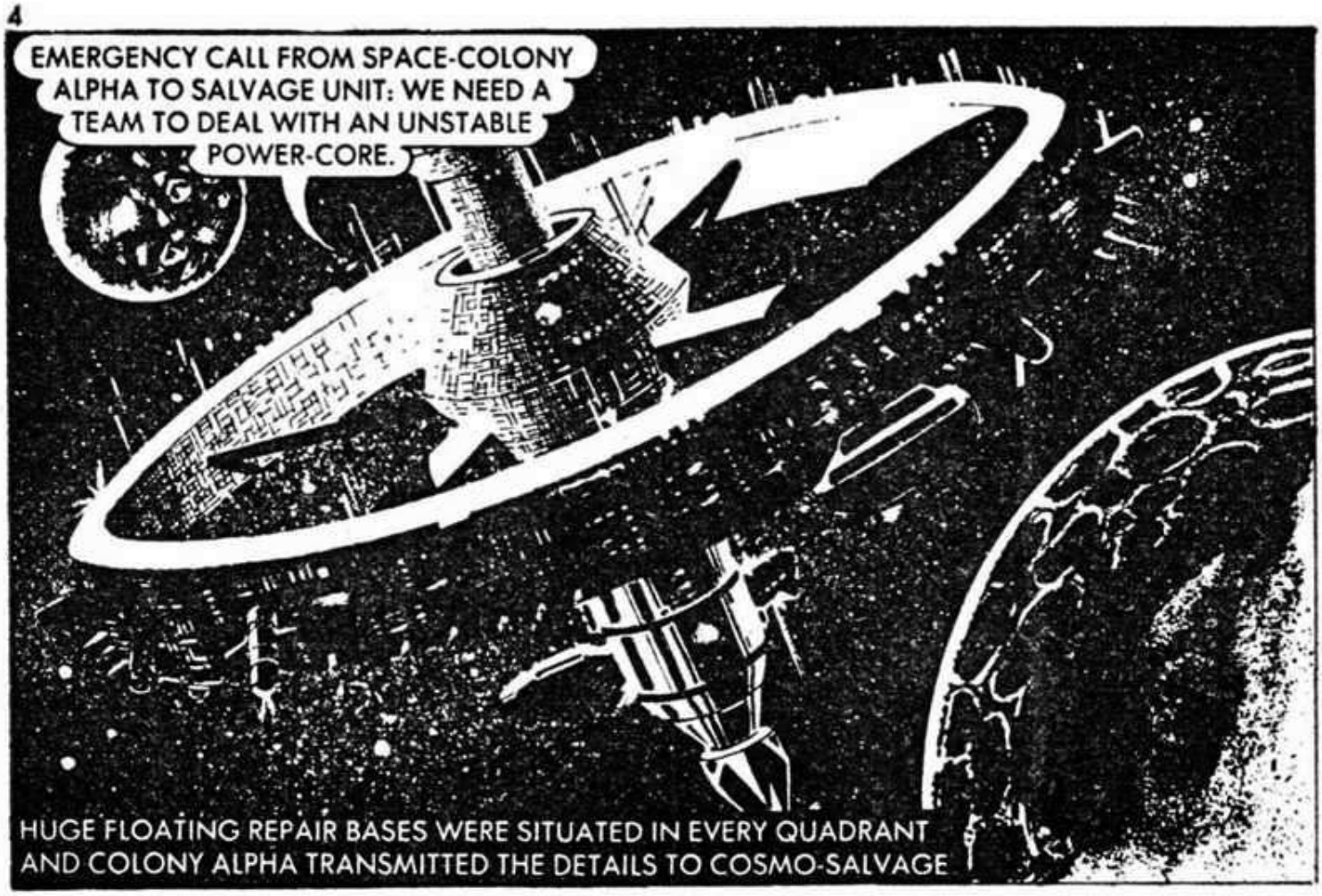
STARBLAZER

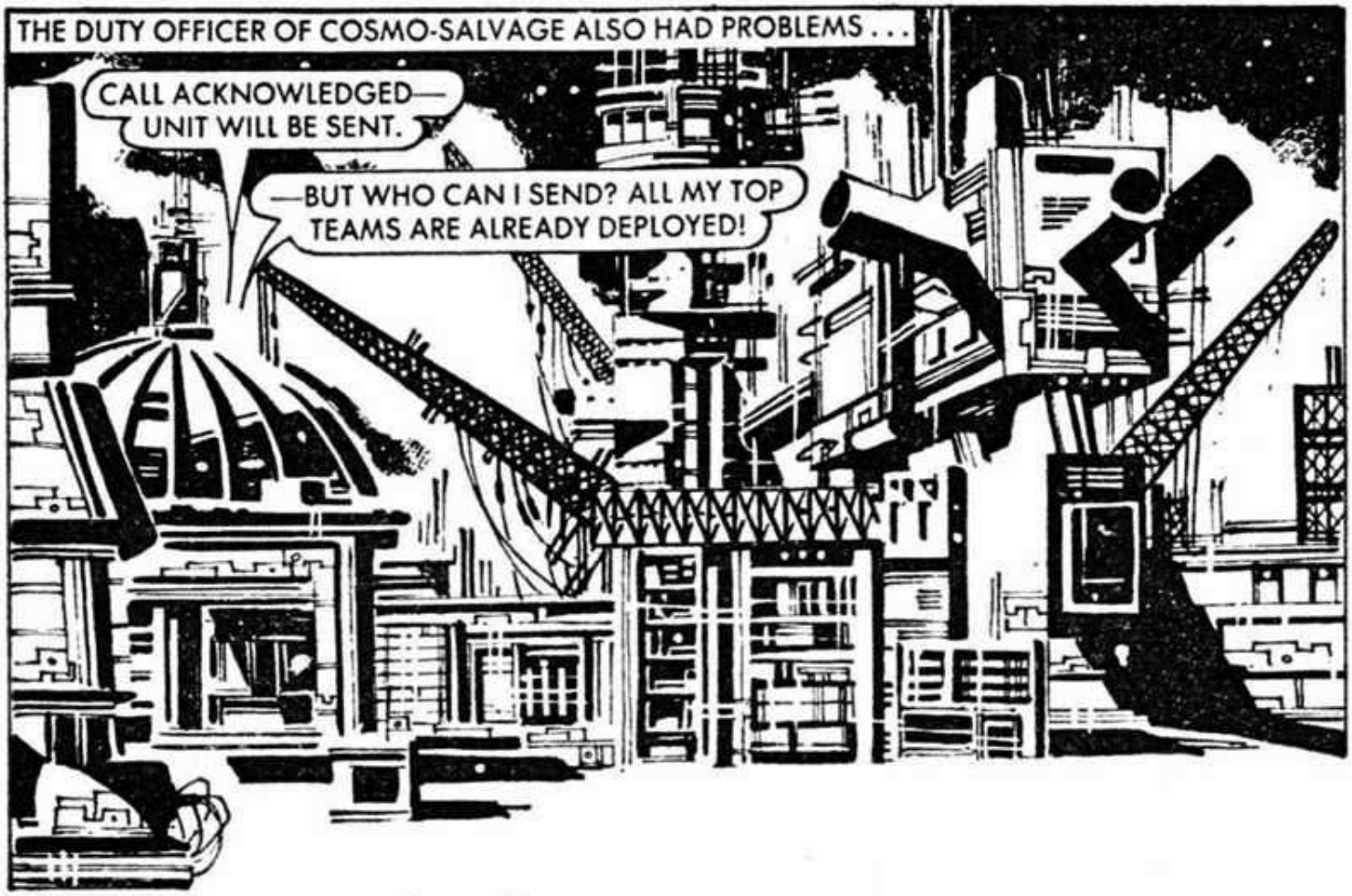
HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS HAD ALWAYS BEEN A CHALLENGE TO EARTHMEN. HOMES HAD BEEN MADE IN THE DESERT OR ON THE ARCTIC TUNDRA. AS NEW WORLDS WERE OPENED UP THEY MADE HOMES IN THE ULTIMATE HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT—OUTER SPACE. THE HAZARDS OF LIFE IN DEEP SPACE HOWEVER, WERE NOTHING COMPARED TO THE HIDDEN DANGERS WHICH LAY IN WAIT FOR THE UNWARY ON UNCHARTED PLANETS. STRANGE, EXOTIC, ALIEN DEATH TRAPS . . . SUCH AS THE CAVES OF CRYSTAL CARBON.

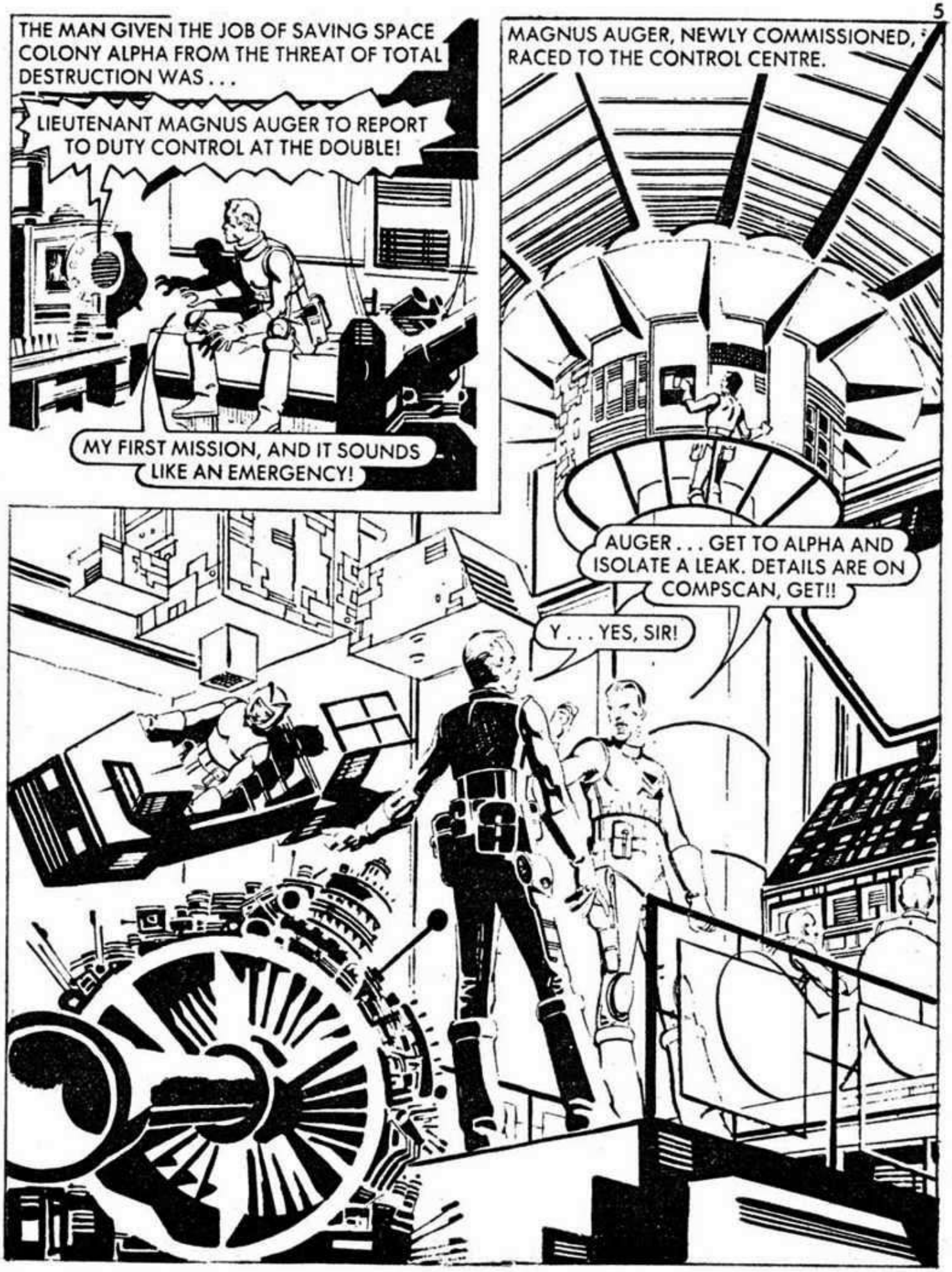
THE CAVES OF CRYSTAL CARBON

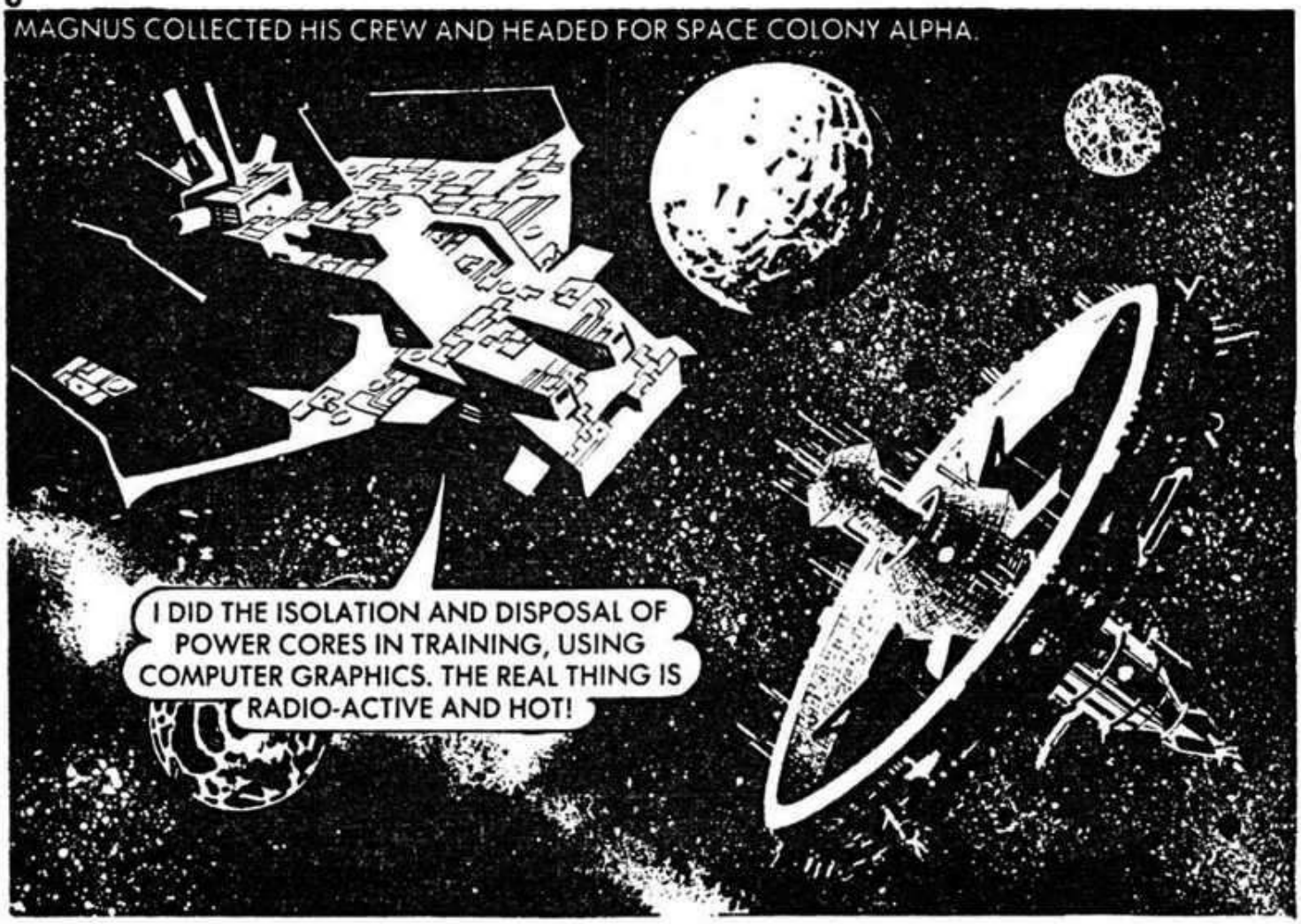
SPACE COLONY ALPHA WAS A HUGE FLOATING CITY . . . AND DEATHTRAP WHEN ITS REACTOR CRACKED. THE NAME OF THE HERO WHO SAVED THE SPACE-COLONY FROM TOTAL DESTRUCTION, WAS NEVER KNOWN. THE INSTANT AFTER HE LOCKED THE SAFETY DOOR, HIS BODY WAS REDUCED TO DUST BY THE INTENSE RADIATION FROM THE CRACK IN THE POWER CORE PROTECTIVE SHIELD.

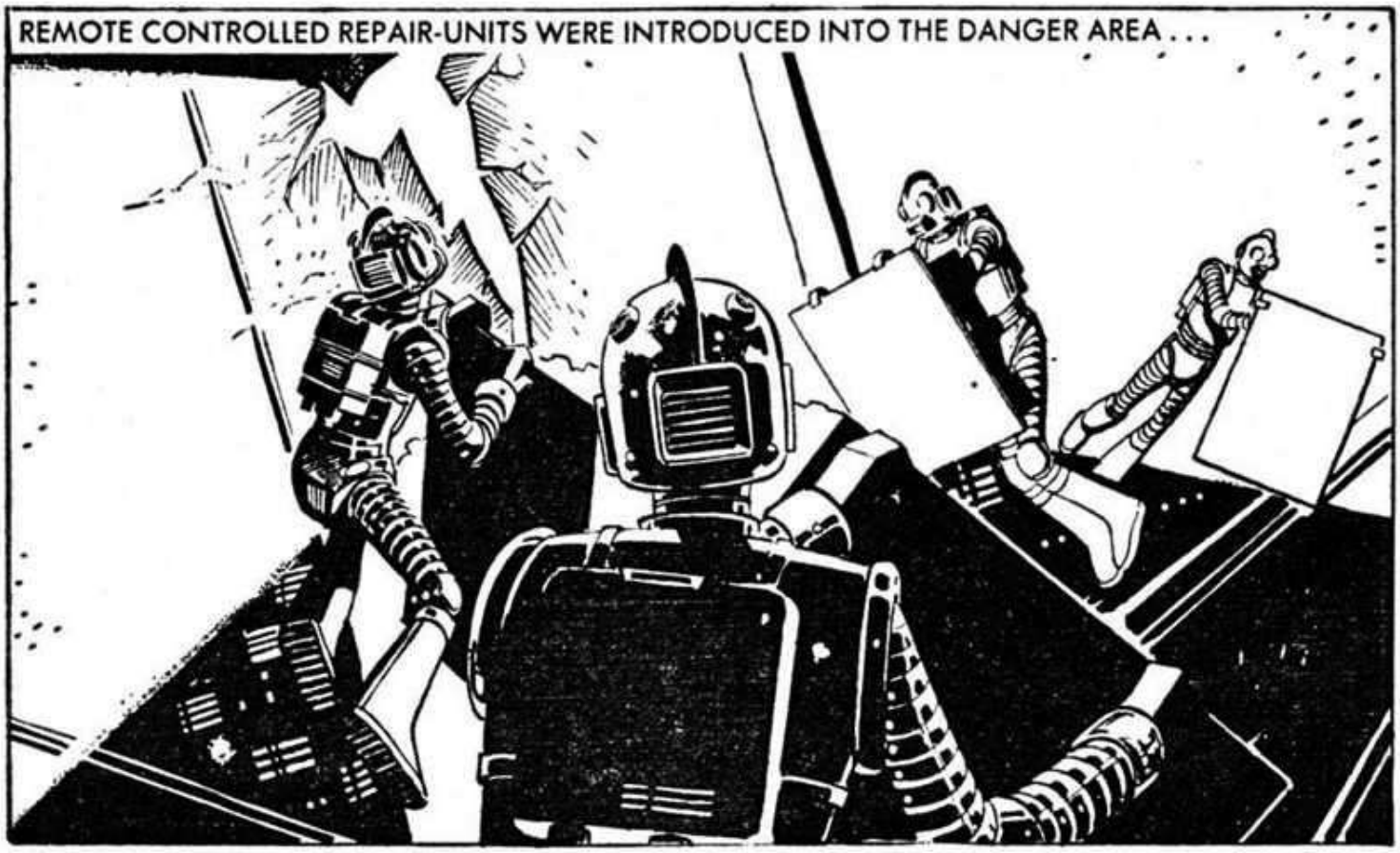


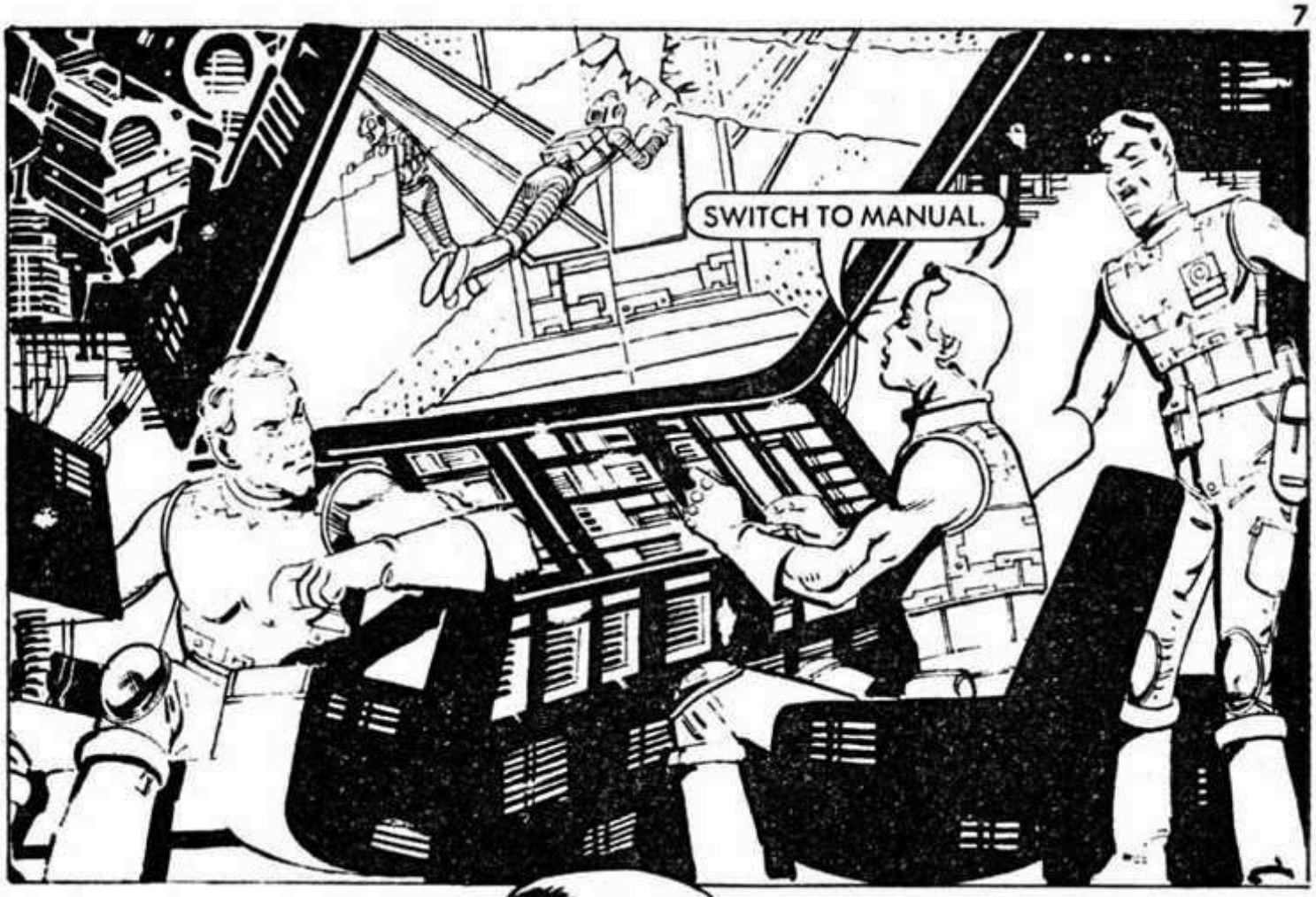

EMERGENCY CALL FROM SPACE-COLONY ALPHA TO SALVAGE UNIT: WE NEED A TEAM TO DEAL WITH AN UNSTABLE POWER-CORE.
HUGE FLOATING REPAIR BASES WERE SITUATED IN EVERY QUADRANT AND COLONY ALPHA TRANSMITTED THE DETAILS TO COSMO-SALVAGE

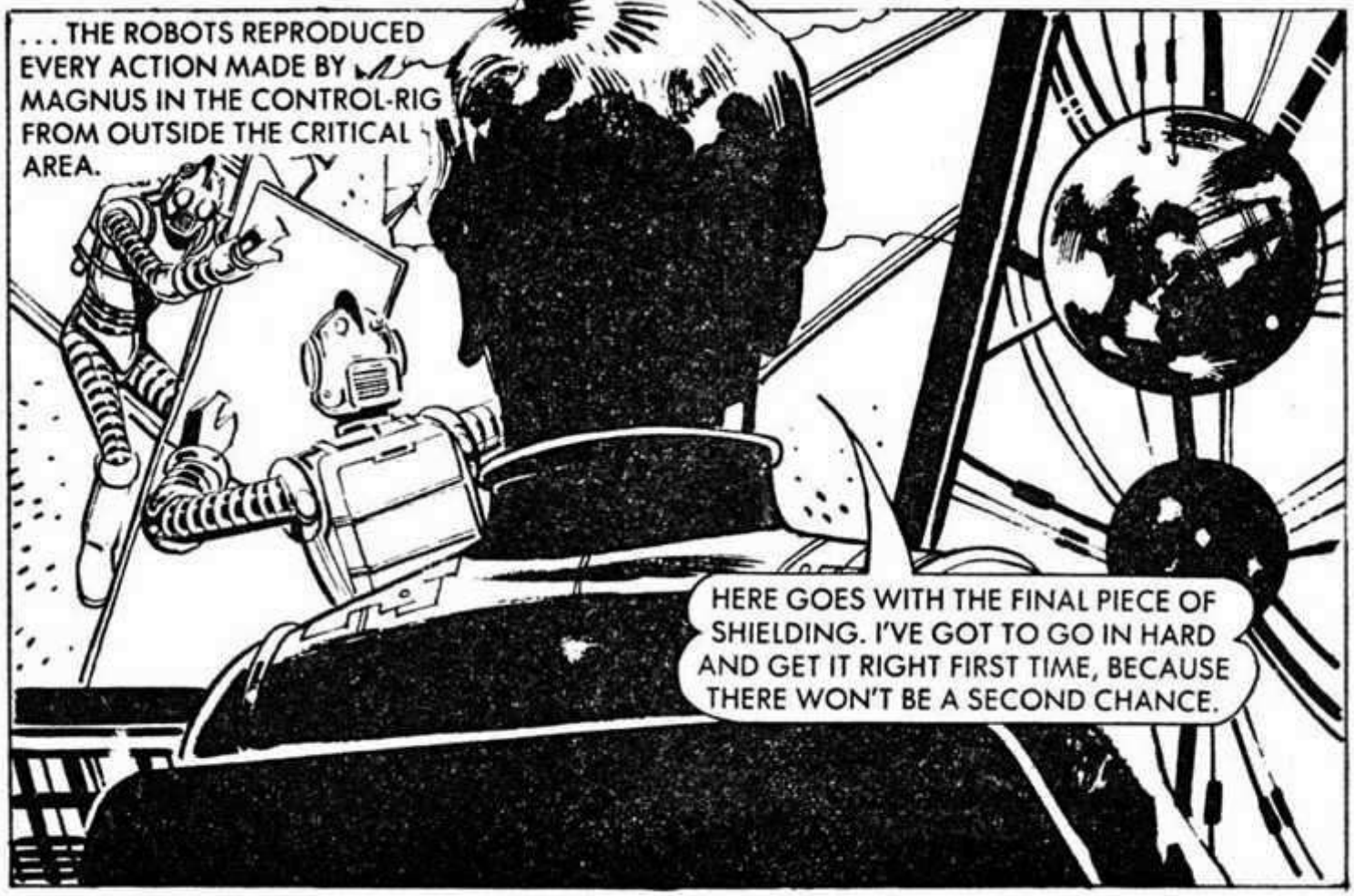

THE DUTY OFFICER OF COSMO-SALVAGE ALSO HAD PROBLEMS . . .
CALL ACKNOWLEDGED— UNIT WILL BE SENT.
—BUT WHO CAN I SEND? ALL MY TOP TEAMS ARE ALREADY DEPLOYED!


THE MAN GIVEN THE JOB OF SAVING SPACE COLONY ALPHA FROM THE THREAT OF TOTAL DESTRUCTION WAS . . .
LIEUTENANT MAGNUS AUGER TO REPORT TO DUTY CONTROL AT THE DOUBLE!
MY FIRST MISSION, AND IT SOUNDS LIKE AN EMERGENCY!
MAGNUS AUGER, NEWLY COMMISSIONED, RACED TO THE CONTROL CENTRE.
AUGER . . . GET TO ALPHA AND ISOLATE A LEAK. DETAILS ARE ON COMPSCAN, GET!!
Y . . . YES, SIR!


MAGNUS COLLECTED HIS CREW AND HEADED FOR SPACE COLONY ALPHA.
I DID THE ISOLATION AND DISPOSAL OF POWER CORES IN TRAINING, USING COMPUTER GRAPHICS. THE REAL THING IS RADIO-ACTIVE AND HOT!


REMOTE CONTROLLED REPAIR-UNITS WERE INTRODUCED INTO THE DANGER AREA . . .


SWITCH TO MANUAL.


. . . THE ROBOTS REPRODUCED EVERY ACTION MADE BY MAGNUS IN THE CONTROL-RIG FROM OUTSIDE THE CRITICAL AREA.
HERE GOES WITH THE FINAL PIECE OF SHIELDING. I'VE GOT TO GO IN HARD AND GET IT RIGHT FIRST TIME, BECAUSE THERE WON'T BE A SECOND CHANCE.

THE POWER CORE WAS EXTRACTED AND DEPOSITED SAFELY IN A RADIATION CONTAINER.
RADIATION LEVEL IS NOW DOWN AND STILL FALLING, SIR.

THE NEXT TRIAL OF MAGNUS AUGER'S ABILITY CAME AS HE CARRIED THE UNSTABLE POWER CORE FOR SAFE DISPOSAL ON A BARREN ASTEROID.
LIEUTENANT! FAULT REPORT FROM ION-CHAMBER CONTROL. WE'VE LOST HYPER-JUMP FLIGHT CAPABILITY.

AS MAGNUS CHECKED THE MALFUNCTION, ENGINEER HARRIS OFFERED HIS VIEW—

THE SPACE-DOME OWNED BY KITORE IS WITHIN REACH. THEY'D FIX THE PROBLEM, NO SWEAT.

XY.9

MAYBE, BUT WE'LL PUT DOWN ON AN UNINHABITED PLANET AND DO THE REPAIR WORK OURSELVES.

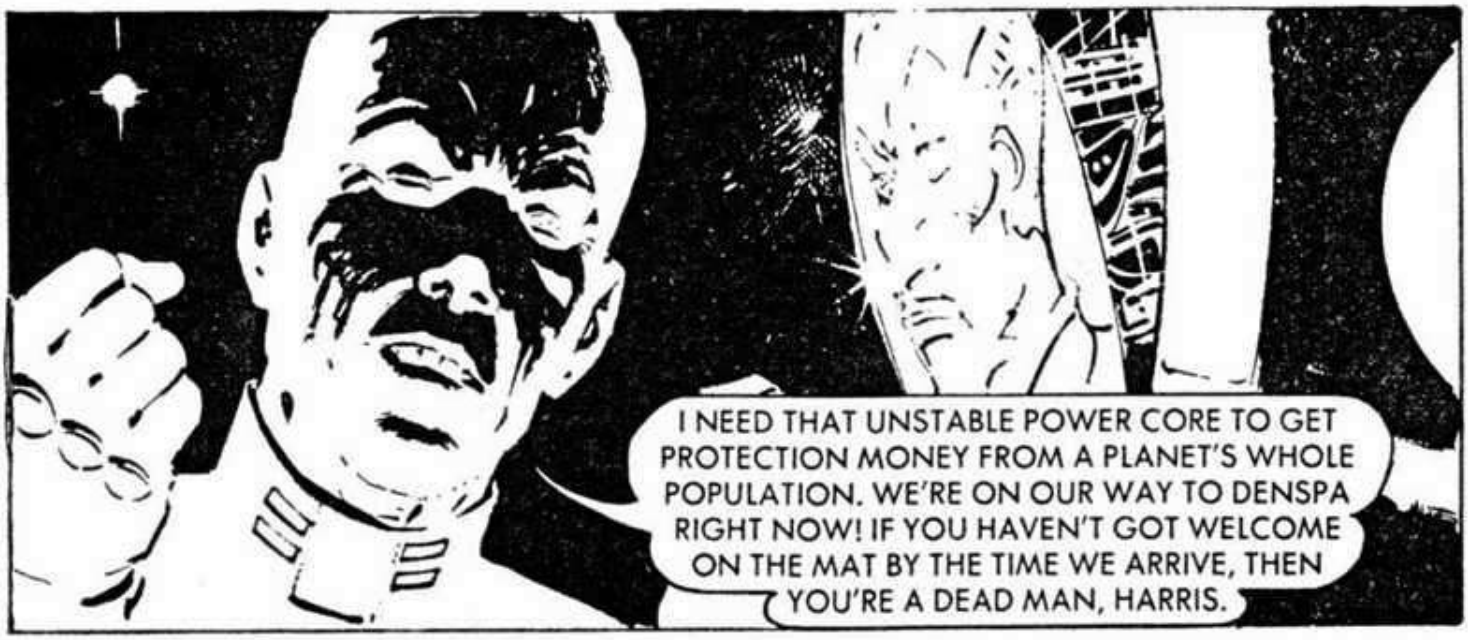
MJ.

YOU'RE CRAZY!

AND YOU'RE INSUBORDINATE! BACK TO YOUR POST, MISTER HARRIS. I'M NOT GOING TO KITORE'S SPACE-DROME WHILE THAT UNSTABLE POWER CORE IS ON BOARD.

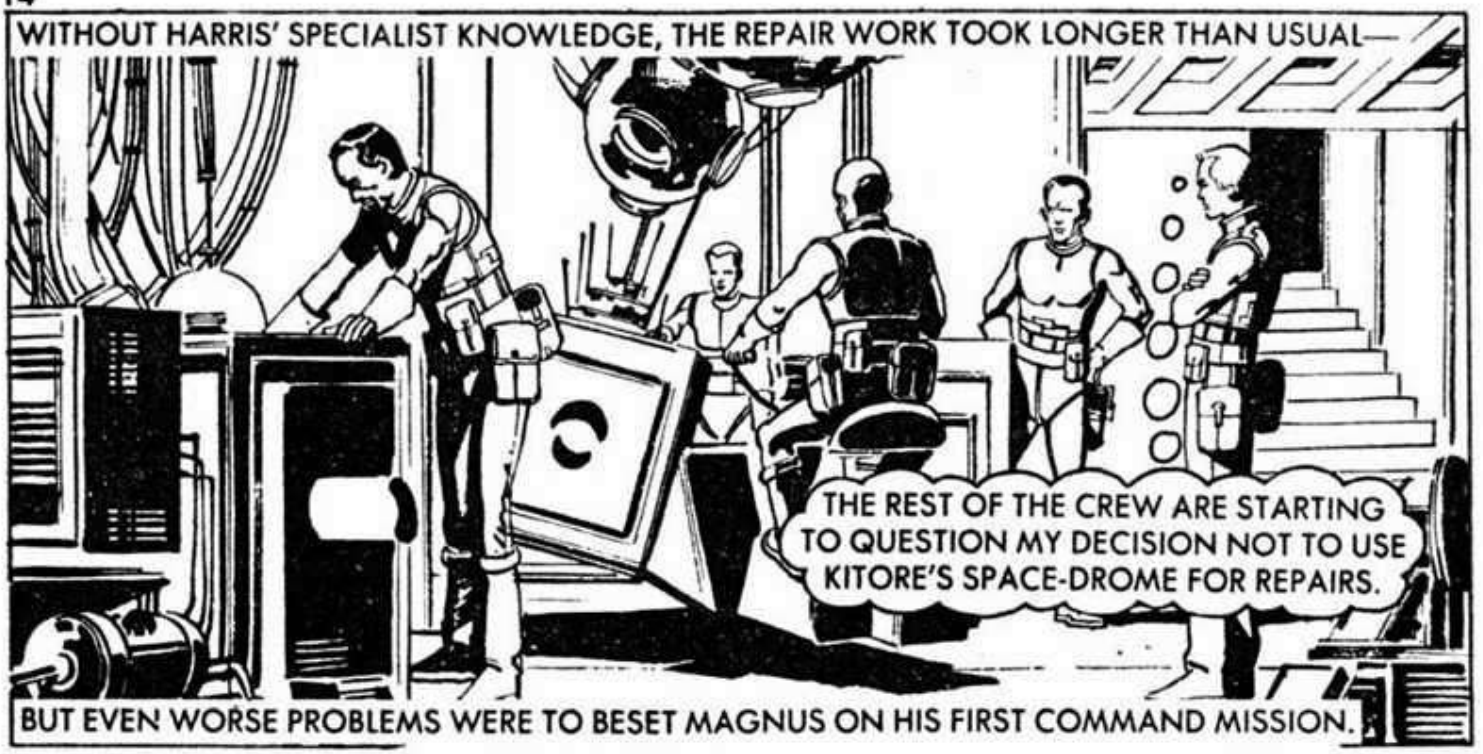
MAGNUS KNEW THAT THE DANGERS OF TRYING TO DO THEIR OWN REPAIRS ON AN UNINHABITED PLANET WERE GREAT, BUT HE HAD REASON FOR TURNING DOWN HARRIS' SUGGESTION.
THAT UNIT WAS SABOTAGED. HARRIS AS THE ENGINEER HAD THE SKILL AND IF HE WANTS ME TO VISIT KITORE THAT DESPERATELY, I DON'T WANT TO GO.
KITORE WAS A NONE TOO SCRUPULOUS TRADER WHO TOOK WHAT HE WANTED ON HIS ASTEROID-DOME—
HEY, KITORE! THE GUY WE GOT PLANTED IN COSMO-SALVAGE IS ON THE TUBE. SAYS IT'S URGENT.
IF HE ISN'T ON HIS WAY HERE WITH THAT POWER CORE I'LL LIQUIDISE HIS BRAINS.

WE'RE PUTTING DOWN FOR REPAIRS ON THE UNINHABITED PLANET OF DENSPA BY ORDER OF THE LIEUTENANT.
YOU'VE FAILED ME HARRIS AND YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENS TO THOSE WHO FAIL ME!


I NEED THAT UNSTABLE POWER CORE TO GET PROTECTION MONEY FROM A PLANET'S WHOLE POPULATION. WE'RE ON OUR WAY TO DENSPA RIGHT NOW! IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT WELCOME ON THE MAT BY THE TIME WE ARRIVE, THEN YOU'RE A DEAD MAN, HARRIS.

HARRIS HAD A HIDDEN TRANSMIT LINK WITH KITORE.
KITORE'S A HARD MAN, BUT THE REWARDS HE OFFERS MAKE THE RISKS WORTHWHILE.
MAGNUS HAD ELECTRONICALLY BUGGED HARRIS—
BUT NOT WORTH A THING IN PRISON!
HARRIS WAS PUT IN A HOLDING CELL.
YOU THINK YOU'RE SMART. LET'S SEE IF YOU'RE SMART ENOUGH TO REPAIR THAT ION-CHAMBER WITHOUT MY ENGINEERING KNOWLEDGE.
HARRIS IS RIGHT, I'VE GOT A PROBLEM. BUT WHAT WORRIES ME MORE IS HOW LOYAL THE REST OF THE CREW WILL BE WHEN KITORE GETS HERE.

MAGNUS CHOSE A SUITABLE LANDING SITE ON DENSPA, WHERE HE HOPED TO COMPLETE REPAIRS BEFORE KITORE COULD LOCATE HIM.
WE'LL NEED TO CLOSE DOWN ALL POWER TO OUR DEFENSIVE SCREENS TO GET AT THE DAMAGE, BUT THERE'S NO HOSTILE LIFE EVER BEEN RECORDED ON THIS PLANET.

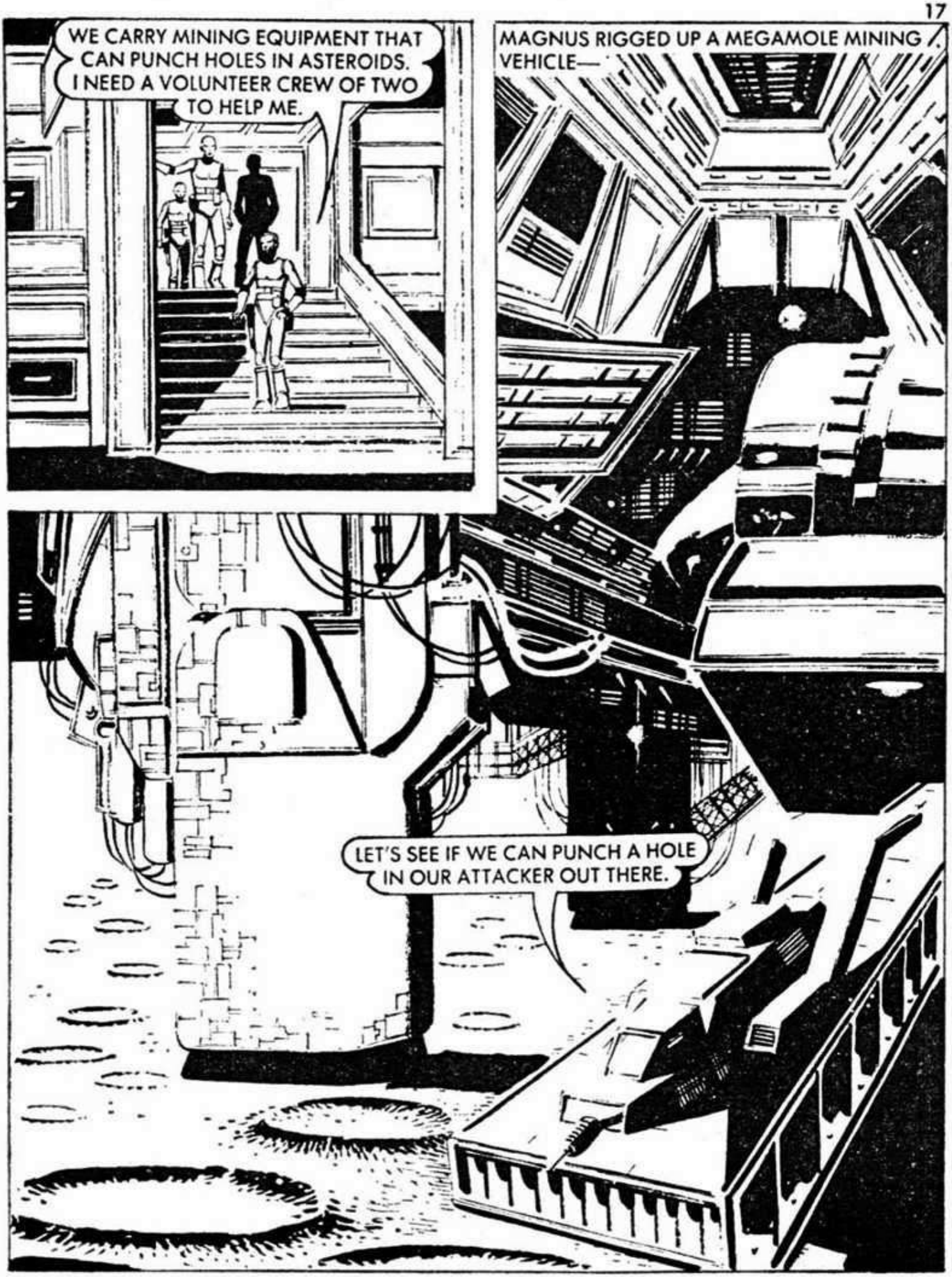

WITHOUT HARRIS' SPECIALIST KNOWLEDGE, THE REPAIR WORK TOOK LONGER THAN USUAL—
THE REST OF THE CREW ARE STARTING TO QUESTION MY DECISION NOT TO USE KITORE'S SPACE-DROME FOR REPAIRS.
BUT EVEN WORSE PROBLEMS WERE TO BESET MAGNUS ON HIS FIRST COMMAND MISSION.

TELL THE LIEUTENANT WE'VE GOT AN UNIDENTIFIED TRACE ON THE SCANNER. HE'D BETTER START RECONNECTING THE DEFENCE SCREENS IN CASE IT'S HOSTILE.

THE TRACE WAS A THERMO-LASER—
IT IS HOSTILE!
THE FORCE FIELD HAS BLOCKED THE SECOND SALVO OF THAT THING: WE'RE SAFE!

NO WE'RE NOT! WE CAN'T TAKE OFF UNLESS THE REPAIRS ARE COMPLETED, AND WE CAN'T COMPLETE THE REPAIRS UNLESS WE CLOSE DOWN THE FORCE SHIELD. IF THE FORCEFIELD IS CLOSED DOWN, THOSE CANNON WILL GET US.

IF THIS SHIP WAS ARMED WE COULD HAVE A CRACK AT THE THING.
THAT'S THE ANSWER! WE NEED TO ATTACK!


WE CARRY MINING EQUIPMENT THAT CAN PUNCH HOLES IN ASTEROIDS. I NEED A VOLUNTEER CREW OF TWO TO HELP ME.
MAGNUS RIGGED UP A MEGAMOLE MINING VEHICLE—
LET'S SEE IF WE CAN PUNCH A HOLE IN OUR ATTACKER OUT THERE.

THE MEGAMOLE BURROWED UNDER THE DEFENSIVE FORCE SHIELD AND HEADED UNDERGROUND TOWARDS THE MYSTERIOUS ATTACKER.

AIM TO SURFACE BEHIND THE ATTACKER, THAT WILL GIVE US THE BENEFIT OF SURPRISE.
ACCORDING TO THE COMPUTER WE'RE RIGHT UNDER THE CANNON EMPLACEMENT NOW.

AS SOON AS WE'RE ON AN EVEN KEEL I'LL ACTIVATE THE PHOTON RAM.

THE PHOTON RAM WAS NORMALLY USED TO DRILL THROUGH HARD ROCK.

XZ.90

THE RAM'S HAD NO EFFECT, EXCEPT TO INVITE OURSELVES TO BECOME A PRIME TARGET.

A CRASH DIVE IS OUR ONLY CHANCE OF SURVIVAL!

BUT THE ATTACKER WAS ARMED WITH SEARCH AND DESTROY MISSILE SYSTEMS.

THE MISSILE FOLLOWED THE MEGAMOLE UNDERGROUND AND . . .

ON BOARD THE MEGAMOLE—
WE MANAGED TO PUT ENOUGH ROCK BEHIND US TO ACT AGAINST THE BLAST.
I THINK I'D RATHER BE DEAD THAN BURIED ALIVE.

WE'RE NOT IN OUR GRAVES YET. WITH HAND-DRILLS AND BREATHING MASKS WE CAN TUNNEL OUT BY OURSELVES.

THE BUILDERS OF THAT CANNON MUST ASSUME WE'RE DEAD!

BUT WHEN HE BROKE SURFACE—
WH . . . WHO?
SKX . . !! OLTA EA RHYOT . . . AND DO NOT ATTEMPT ANY MORE FOOLISHNESS.
MAGNUS' TRANSLATOR PAK MADE SENSE OF THE ALIEN TONGUE.

THE MYSTERIOUS ALIENS TOOK MAGNUS AND THE OTHERS.
WE MAINTAIN, AS YOU SAY, A LOW PROFILE.
WHY?

THEY EXPLAINED THAT, COMPLETELY AGAINST GALACTIC LAW THEY WERE A PROSPECTING TEAM, FROM THE PLANET CAPRICORNUS SEARCHING OTHER SYSTEMS FOR PRECIOUS MINERALS.
THE MINERAL DEPOSITS IN THESE HILLS HAVE CREATED AN UNDERGROUND STASIS FIELD WHICH MAKES OUR MINING MACHINES USELESS. WE HAVE USE FOR PUNY TERRAN BODIES!
WHY DON'T YOU DO YOUR OWN MINING?
YOU'LL FIND OUT THE REASON ONCE YOU'RE DOWN THERE, SLAVE!

YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN FROM HERE.

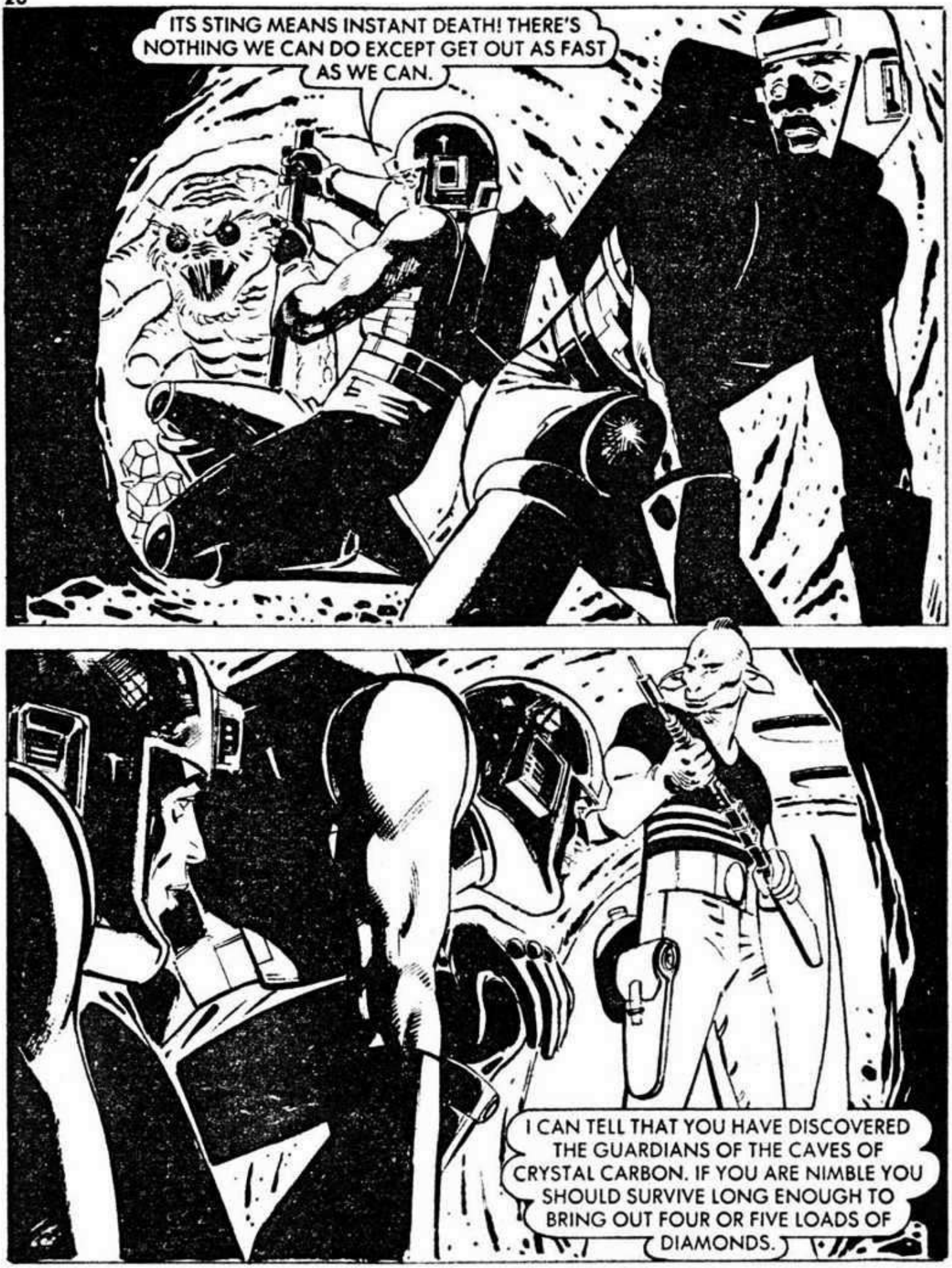
THEY'RE AFRAID OF SOMETHING MORE DANGEROUS THAN A SIMPLE STATIS FIELD.

THE NARROW PASSAGE LED TO A LARGE UNDERGROUND CHAMBER.
BY THE SUNS OF URANII—THERE'S A GALACTIC EMPEROR'S RANSOM IN HERE!

THE WALLS ARE CARBON . . . IN THE FORM OF DIAMOND. I'VE NEVER SEEN A DEPOSIT SO RICH BEFORE!

WE'RE MADE FOR LIFE!
I DOUBT IT . . . THE CAPRICORNS WERE SCARED OF SOMETHING!!

AN EVIL SMELL HERALDED THE ARRIVAL OF THE DANGER—
WHAT THE . . ?

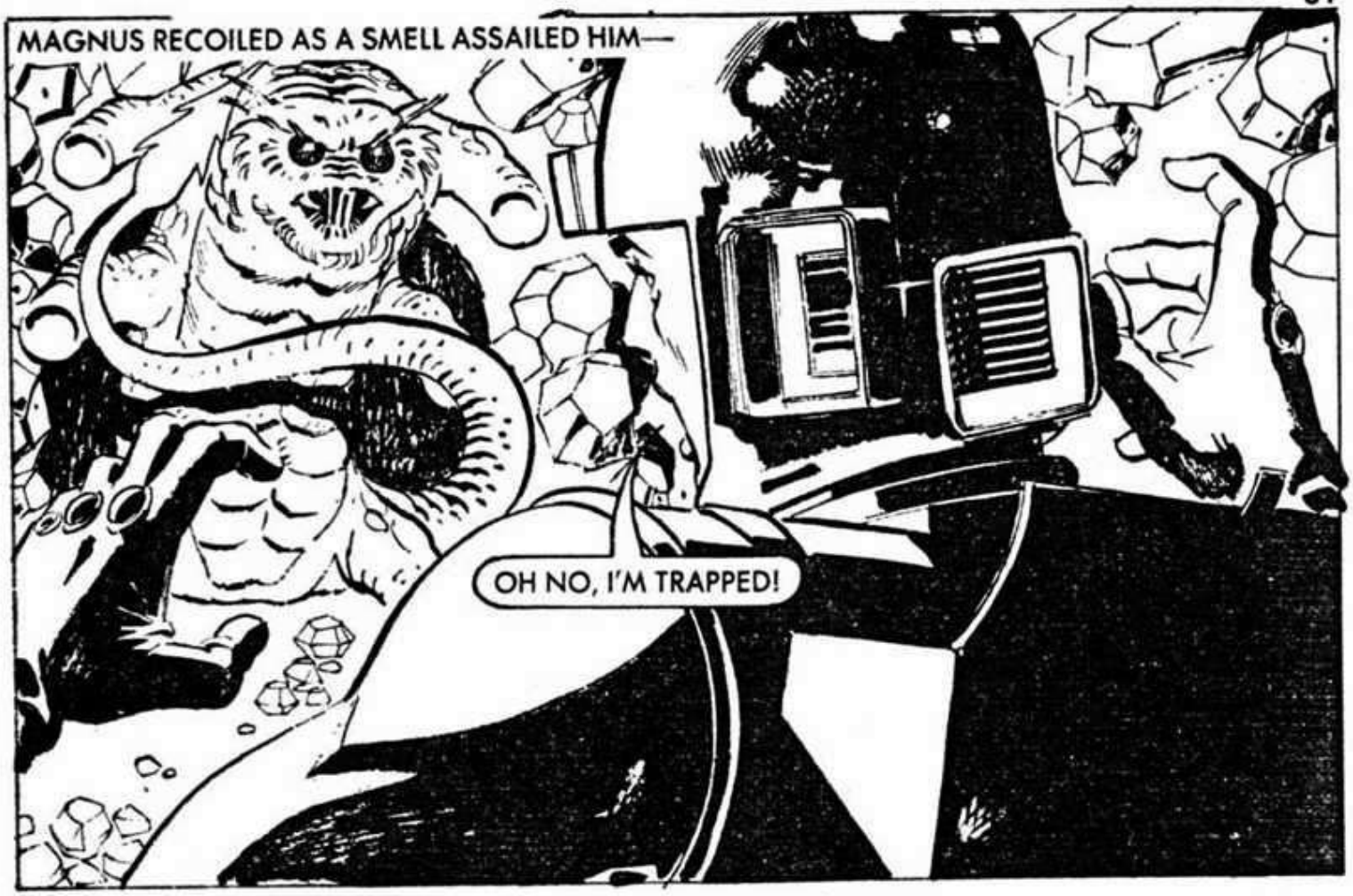

ITS STING MEANS INSTANT DEATH! THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO EXCEPT GET OUT AS FAST AS WE CAN.
I CAN TELL THAT YOU HAVE DISCOVERED THE GUARDIANS OF THE CAVES OF CRYSTAL CARBON. IF YOU ARE NIMBLE YOU SHOULD SURVIVE LONG ENOUGH TO BRING OUT FOUR OR FIVE LOADS OF DIAMONDS.

YOU STAR-SPAWNED ABOMINATION! IT'S CERTAIN DEATH TO GO BACK TO THE CAVE.
IT IS ALSO CERTAIN DEATH TO REFUSE!

I BELIEVE THAT WHILE THERE'S LIFE, THERE'S HOPE. I'M GOING BACK.

LOOKS LIKE MY FIRST MISSION WILL BE MY LAST.

BACK IN THE CHAMBER—
THIS IS A BURIAL CHAMBER . . . THE OLD RACE OF THIS PLANET MUST HAVE BURIED THEIR KINGS IN DOUBLE QUICK TIME TO AVOID THOSE THINGS, UNLESS . . .


MAGNUS RECOILED AS A SMELL ASSAILED HIM—
OH NO, I'M TRAPPED!

THEY MUST HAVE HAD SOME WAY OF KEEPING THOSE THINGS AWAY WHEN THEY MADE THE BURIAL.

THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS USED TO FULLY EQUIP AND ARM THEIR DEAD—LET'S SEE IF THIS RACE DID THE SAME.
IT WORKS! MY LUCK'S CHANGED!

OFF YOU GO, THERE'S SOMEONE WHO'S DYING TO MEET YOU AT THE OTHER END OF THAT HOLE.

HEY, I'VE GOT SOMETHING SPECIAL FOR YOU.
BRING IT!

YARRRGH!

MAGNUS RELEASED THE CREATURE FROM THE INFLUENCE OF THE MACE AND IT SCUTTLED BACK TO ITS NATURAL HABITAT WITHIN THE STASIS FIELD.
NOW TO GET BACK TO MY SHIP.
MAGNUS FOUGHT HIS WAY FREE—
EVERYONE TAKE REFUGE IN THE SHIP, ONE OF THE PRISONERS IS FREE AND HAS A WEAPON!

THEY'VE ALL HOLED UP IN THE SHIP, WHICH LEAVES THEIR GROUND TRANSPORT UNGUARDED.
MAGNUS LEAPT INTO AN AIRCAR—

ONE OF THE ALIENS HAD BEEN CAUGHT IN THE OPEN WHEN THE SHOOTING STARTED AND HAD TAKEN REFUGE IN THE TRUCK. HE WAS UNARMED.
WHAT'S IT TO BE? DEAD HERO OR A LIVING COLLABORATOR?
THE ALIEN AGREED TO COLLABORATE.
THERE'S NO SIGN OF KITORE. IF THE REPAIRS HAVE BEEN COMPLETED WE MIGHT ESCAPE HIM.
MAGNUS DID NOT GET THE RECEPTION HE EXPECTED FROM HIS CREW.
THERE'S NO NEED FOR THE GUNS. THE ALIEN IS MY PRISONER.
AND YOU ARE OUR PRISONER, LIEUTENANT.

LOWER YOUR GUN!
WE DON'T TAKE ORDERS FROM YOU ANY MORE.
HARRIS!
THAT'S RIGHT, MISTER AUGER. THEY TAKE THEIR ORDERS FROM ME NOW AND I TAKE MINE FROM KITORE. IT'S SURPRISING WHAT THE PROMISE OF WEALTH WILL DO TO A MAN'S LOYALTY.

HARRIS HAD MAGNUS AND THE ALIEN LOCKED IN THE SHIP'S HOLDING UNIT—
I HOPE I HAVE LEFT THE CELL AS YOU WOULD WISH TO FIND IT, LIEUTENANT!

ONCE THEY WERE ALONE—
WILL YOU FORGET PAST FIGHTING AND CO-OPERATE WITH ME IN TRYING TO ESCAPE FROM HERE?
WHY NOT, I'VE NOTHING TO LOSE.

I PLEDGE A TRUCE BETWEEN US . . .
. . . AND I, UNTIL WE ARE BOTH FREE AGAIN.

HARRIS HAD CONFISCATED THE GUN BUT HAD FAILED TO SEARCH THE POCKETS OF MAGNUS.
I WANTED THE MEN TO OBEY MY ORDERS OUT OF CONFIDENCE AND RESPECT, BUT IF THE ONLY WAY TO THEIR LOYALTY IS TO PURCHASE IT, THEN I CAN PLAY THAT GAME AS WELL AS HARRIS CAN.

AS SOON AS HARRIS SEIZED CONTROL, HE HAD SIGNALLED HIS POSITION TO KITORE. SHORTLY AFTER MAGNUS WAS IMPRISONED, THE ARCH VILLAIN ARRIVED.
HERE COMES THE MAN WHO'S GOING TO MAKE US ALL RICH.

YOU HAVE THE UNSTABLE POWER CORE READY?
ALL SAFE AND SOUND IN ITS PROTECTIVE CAPSULE.
ONCE THAT CAPSULE IS IN ORBIT ROUND A COLONY PLANET, WITH A DETONATOR ATTACHED, THEY'LL PAY WHATEVER I ASK, TO SAVE THEM FROM THE RELEASE OF ITS LETHAL RADIATION.
YEAH BOSS, THAT'S RIGHT: A KING'S RANSOM!

AS HARRIS SUPERVISED THE TRANSFER OF THE POWER CORE CAPSULE TO KITORE'S SHIP, MAGNUS PURCHASED HIS FREEDOM WITH THE DIAMONDS.
I COULD ONLY GET YOU SOME LOW GRADE EXPLOSIVE, EVERYTHING ELSE WAS TOO WELL WATCHED.
IT'LL BE ENOUGH TO DELAY KITORE AND GET US OFF THIS SHIP.

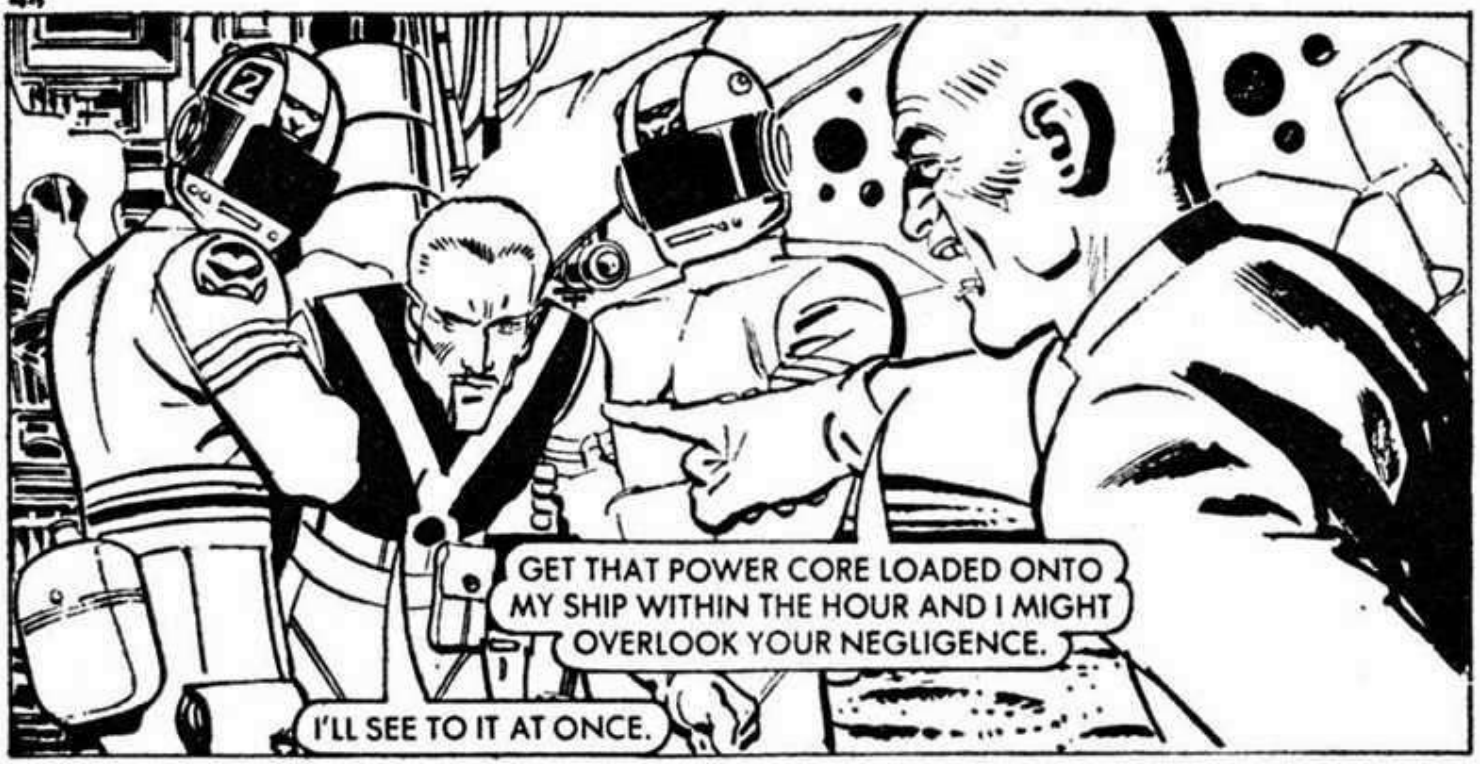
HARRIS WAS TOO PREOCCUPIED WITH THE TRANSFER OF THE POWER CORE CAPSULE TO KEEP A CHECK ON HIS PRISONER.
STEADY AS SHE GOES, TO ME JUST A FRACTION.

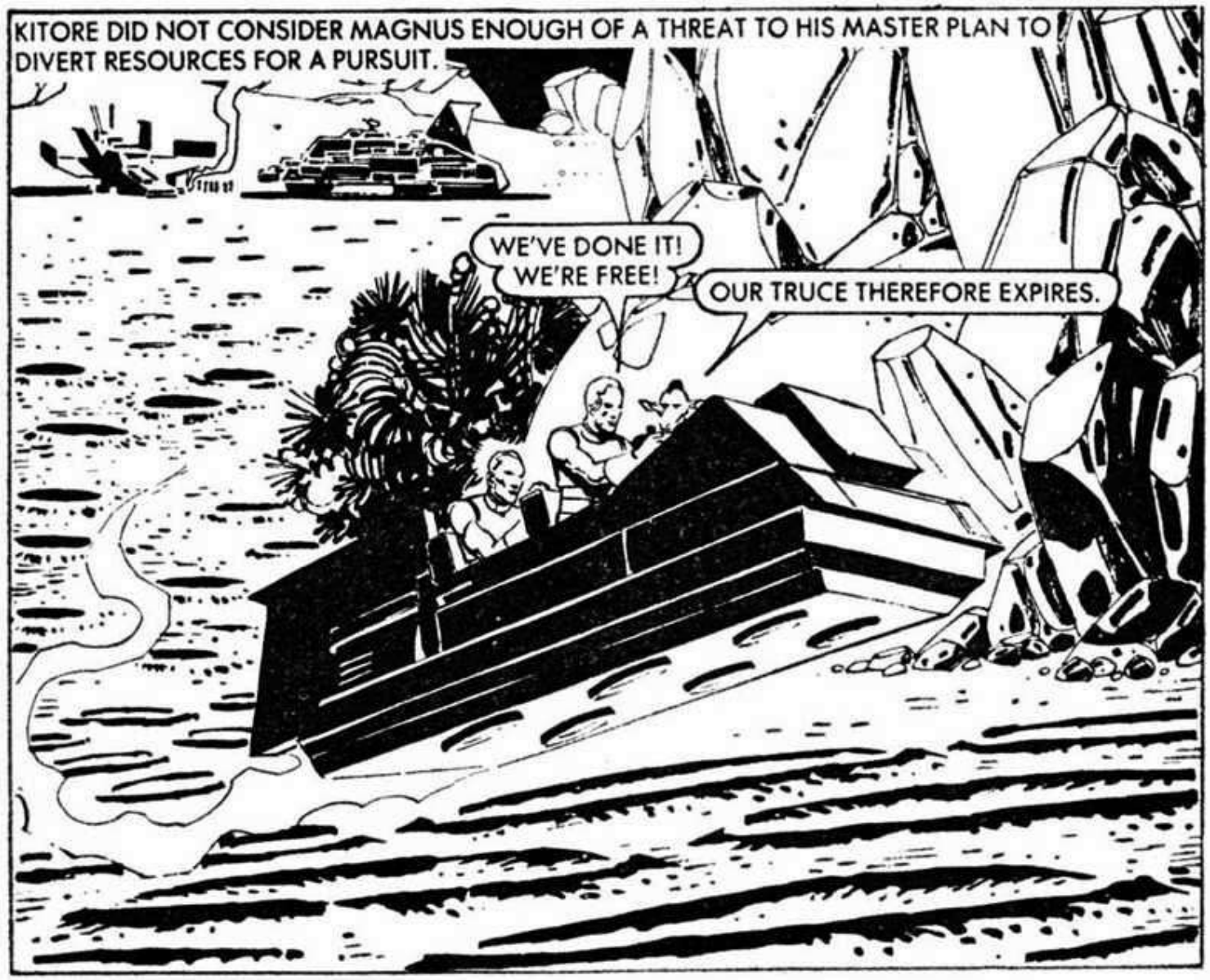
WHAT THE . . .?
IF THE CAPSULE SPLITS WE'LL BE FRAZZLED!
BUT MAGNUS HAD CALCULATED THAT THE CAPSULE WAS STRONG ENOUGH TO SURVIVE THE IMPACT—

ARE YOU TRYING TO RUIN MY PLANS YOU NO-GOOD HEAP OF STARSPAWNED ABOMINATION?
I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED!

THERE'S THE CULPRIT. THE LIEUTENANT HAS ESCAPED!

IF HE BLEW UP YOUR LIFTING GEAR IT WAS BECAUSE OF YOUR NEGLIGENCE. I DON'T LIKE NEGLIGENT PEOPLE!


GET THAT POWER CORE LOADED ONTO MY SHIP WITHIN THE HOUR AND I MIGHT OVERLOOK YOUR NEGLIGENCE.
I'LL SEE TO IT AT ONCE.

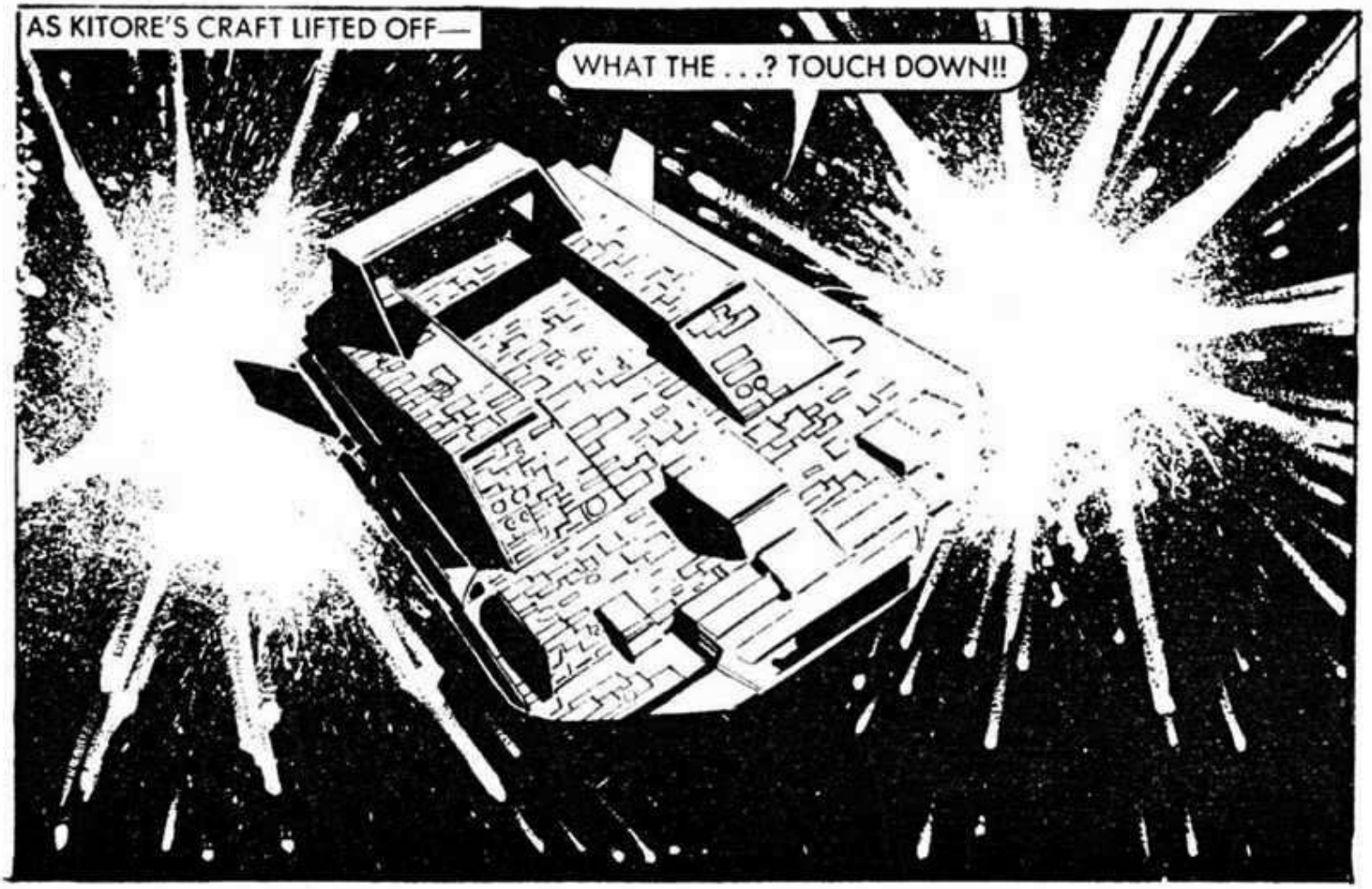

KITORE DID NOT CONSIDER MAGNUS ENOUGH OF A THREAT TO HIS MASTER PLAN TO DIVERT RESOURCES FOR A PURSUIT.
WE'VE DONE IT! WE'RE FREE!
OUR TRUCE THEREFORE EXPIRES.

WILL YOU EXTEND THE TRUCE LONG ENOUGH TO HELP ME STOP KITORE STEALING THAT POWER-CORE?
LOOK AHEAD OF YOU FOR YOUR ANSWER, EARTHMAN.

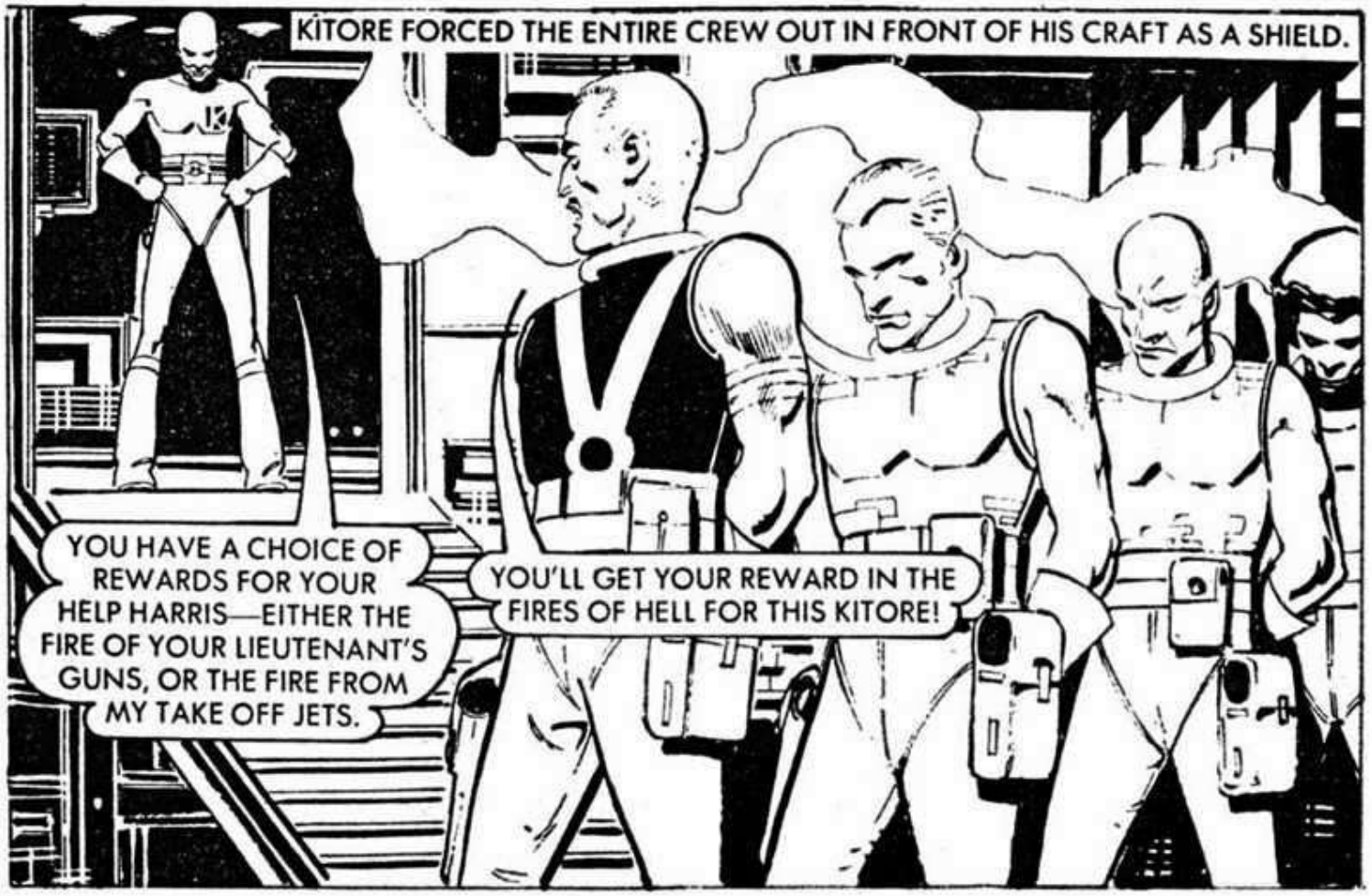
YOU ARE WITHOUT WEAPONS, EARTHMAN! I SUGGEST YOU SURRENDER.

KITORE IS INTENT ON HOLDING A WHOLE PLANET TO RANSOM BY THREATENING THAT WORLD WITH AN UNSTABLE POWER-CORE. WILL YOU HELP ME STOP HIM?
NO! NEVER! IT'S NOT OUR WORLD, WHY SHOULD WE WORRY?
UNLESS YOU HELP ME I'LL DESTROY THE ONE AND ONLY MEANS OF CONTROLLING THE GUARDIANS OF THE CAVES OF CRYSTAL CARBON.
THAT'S A GOOD ENOUGH REASON! I PLEDGE THE HELP OF OUR EXPEDITION.
THANKS, AND I'LL KEEP THE MACE ON A SHORT FUSE TO MAKE SURE YOU HONOUR THAT PLEDGE.

I WANT A WARNING SALVO THAT WILL FRIGHTEN KITORE INTO SURRENDERING.


AS KITORE'S CRAFT LIFTED OFF—
WHAT THE . . .? TOUCH DOWN!!

DO WE SHOOT BACK AT THEM?
NO! I HAVE AN IDEA WHICH WILL BOTH DISPOSE OF HARRIS AND ENSURE US A TROUBLE-FREE TAKE OFF.


KITORE FORCED THE ENTIRE CREW OUT IN FRONT OF HIS CRAFT AS A SHIELD.
YOU HAVE A CHOICE OF REWARDS FOR YOUR HELP HARRIS—EITHER THE FIRE OF YOUR LIEUTENANT'S GUNS, OR THE FIRE FROM MY TAKE OFF JETS.
YOU'LL GET YOUR REWARD IN THE FIRES OF HELL FOR THIS KITORE!

KITORE'S CRAFT BLASTED OFF AGAIN—
CEASE FIRE! HE'S USING MY CREW AS A HUMAN SHIELD.
I DO NOT UNDERSTAND YOU, EARTHMAN. YOU LET YOUR ENEMY ESCAPE IN RETURN FOR THE LIVES OF MEN WHO WERE TRAITORS TO YOU.

MAGNUS FACED HIS CREW—
I INTEND TO GET THAT POWER CORE BACK FROM KITORE BEFORE HE HAS A CHANCE TO CAUSE HAVOC WITH IT. YOU WILL CREW MY SHIP, GET READY— NOW!

WHAT'S THE STATE OF MY SHIP, HARRIS?
SHE'LL TAKE WEEKS TO BE MADE SPACEWORTHY. KITORE DESTROYED THE TRANSMIT EQUIPMENT BEFORE HE LEFT.

I OFFER YOU A DEAL; THE MACE IN RETURN FOR THE USE OF YOUR SHIP.
YOU ARE WELCOME TO MY SHIP. THE MACE WILL GIVE ME THE WEALTH TO HAVE A HUNDRED OTHER SHIPS BUILT.
THE LIEUTENANT MUST BE MAD LEAVING ALL THESE ROCKS BEHIND.
WHAT USE IS WEALTH WHEN CROOKS LIKE KITORE ARE AT LARGE TO STEAL IT.
MAGNUS SALVAGED ANY USEFUL EQUIPMENT FROM HIS GROUNDED SHIP AND GOT READY FOR THE TAKE OFF IN PURSUIT OF KITORE. THE ALIENS SET ABOUT CLEARING THE DIAMONDS FROM THE CAVES OF CRYSTAL CARBON.

ON BOARD THE SHIP—
WE HAVE THE ADVANTAGE THAT KITORE HAS NEVER SEEN THIS SHIP AND WON'T RECOGNISE IT AS A DANGER TO HIM.
KITORE'S GOT A LONG REAL TIME LEAD ON US, BUT WE'LL GET HIM BY TAKING A SHORTCUT THROUGH LAPSE-TIME!
WE'VE ALSO GOT THE ADVANTAGE THAT HE TOLD ME MOST OF HIS PLANS.

WS.77

THE REST OF THE GALAXY WAS STILL UNAWARE OF KITORE'S PLAN TO HOLD A WHOLE PLANET TO RANSOM WITH THE UNSTABLE STOLEN POWER CORE. AT THE HEADQUARTERS OF COSMO-SALVAGE THERE WAS A CALM BEFORE THE CRISIS.
THERE'S STILL NO TRANSMIT MESSAGE FROM MAGNUS, I'LL HAVE TO BEND HIS EAR ABOUT THE NEED FOR REGULAR REPORTS. HELLO, WHAT'S THIS CUTTING IN ON THE EMERGENCY FREQUENCY BAND?

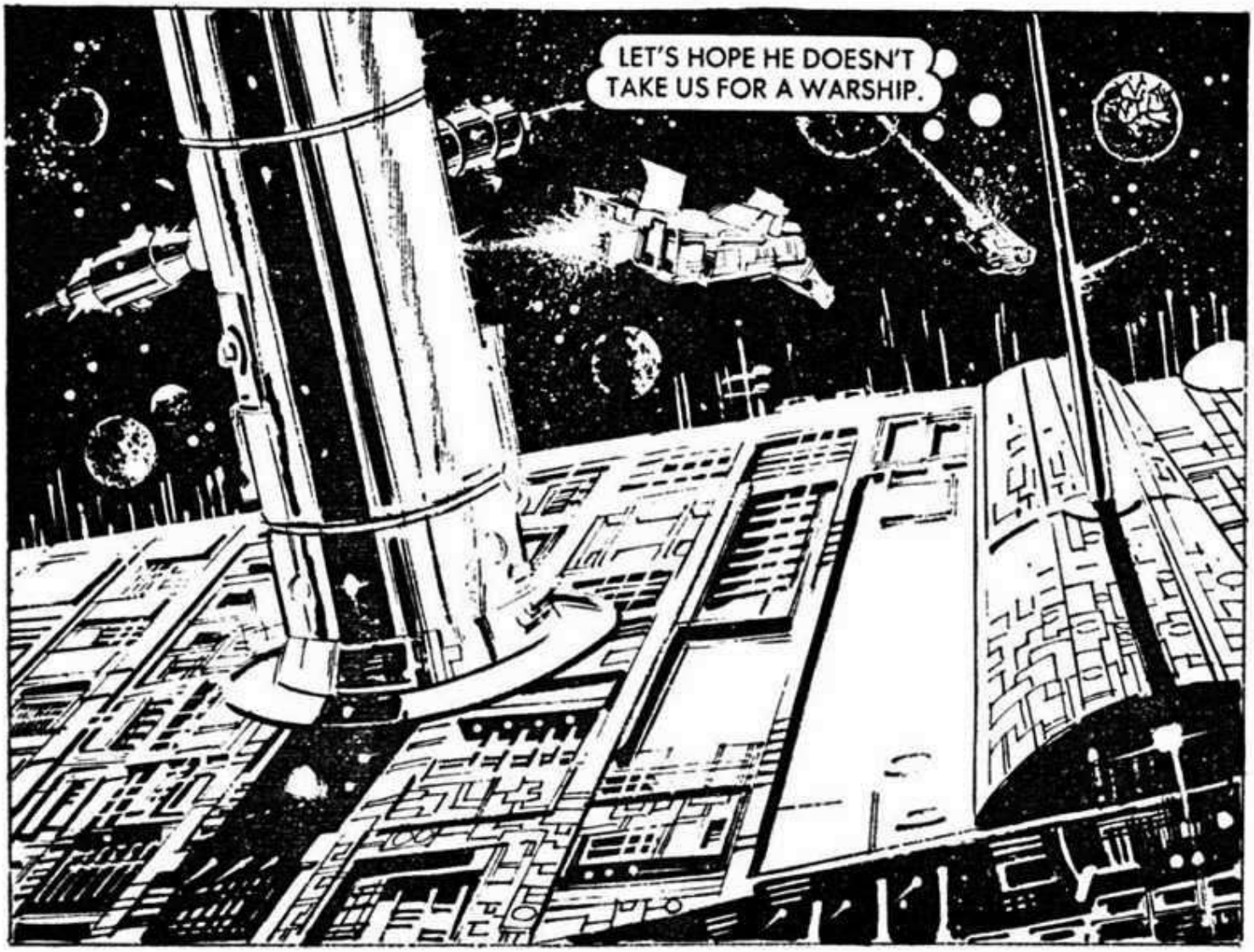
THE CALM WAS ABOUT TO BE SHATTERED . . .
THIS IS KITORE CALLING GALACTIC CENTRAL CONTROL. STAND BY FOR A MESSAGE OF SURPRISE IMPORTANCE . . .
WHAT'S THAT PIRATE KITORE UP TO NOW?

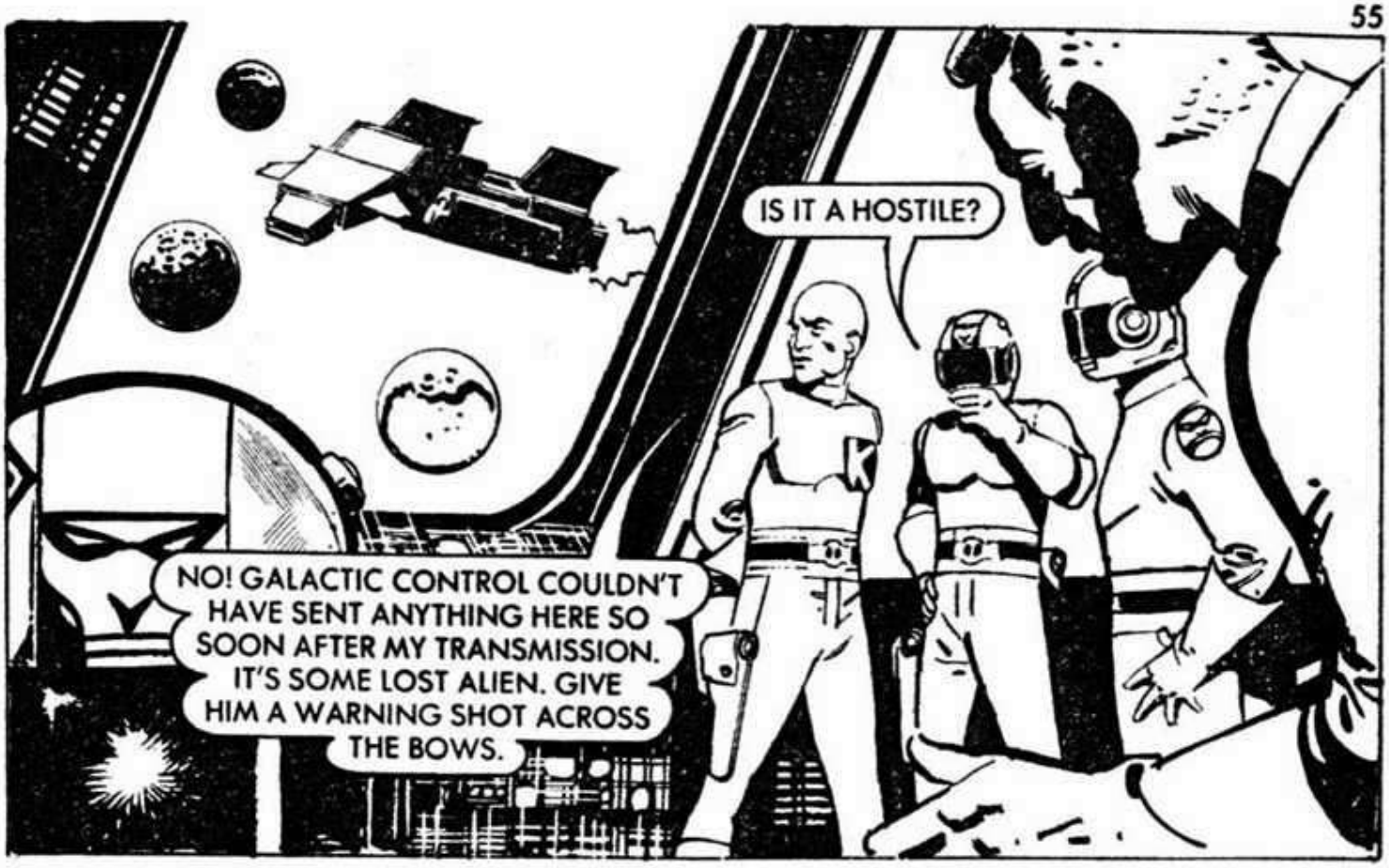
I HAVE THE CAPABILITY TO WIPE OUT ALL HUMAN LIFE ON THE COLONY PLANET OF MOSTELLE BY RELEASING LETHAL RADIATION INTO ITS ATMOSPHERE . . .

. . . BUT I'M REASONABLE AND I'LL LET THE PLANET SURVIVE IN RETURN FOR THE GIFT OF THE FLEET'S BATTLECRUISER.

IF YOU DOUBT THE SUBSTANCE OF MY THREAT, CHECK OUT THIS PICTURE WITH COSMO-SALVAGE.
THAT'S ONE OF OUR PROTECTIVE CAPSULES. THIS EXPLAINS WHY MAGNUS HAS GONE MISSING!

Z.89
GALACTIC CENTRAL CONTROL HAVE 12 TERRAN HOURS TO COMPLY WITH MY DEMANDS. THE ARRIVAL OF ANY WARSHIP WILL RESULT IN THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF THE RADIATION.
YOU WERE RIGHT ABOUT HIS TARGET BEING MOSTELLE. THAT PUTS US ONLY MINUTES AWAY FROM A VISUAL CONTACT.


LET'S HOPE HE DOESN'T TAKE US FOR A WARSHIP.

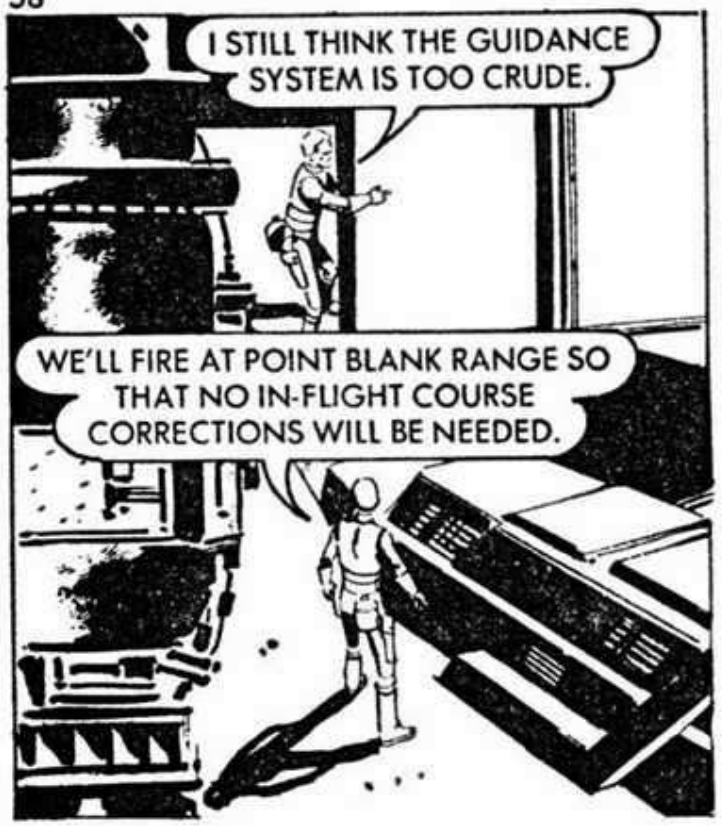

IS IT A HOSTILE?
NO! GALACTIC CONTROL COULDN'T HAVE SENT ANYTHING HERE SO SOON AFTER MY TRANSMISSION. IT'S SOME LOST ALIEN. GIVE HIM A WARNING SHOT ACROSS THE BOWS.

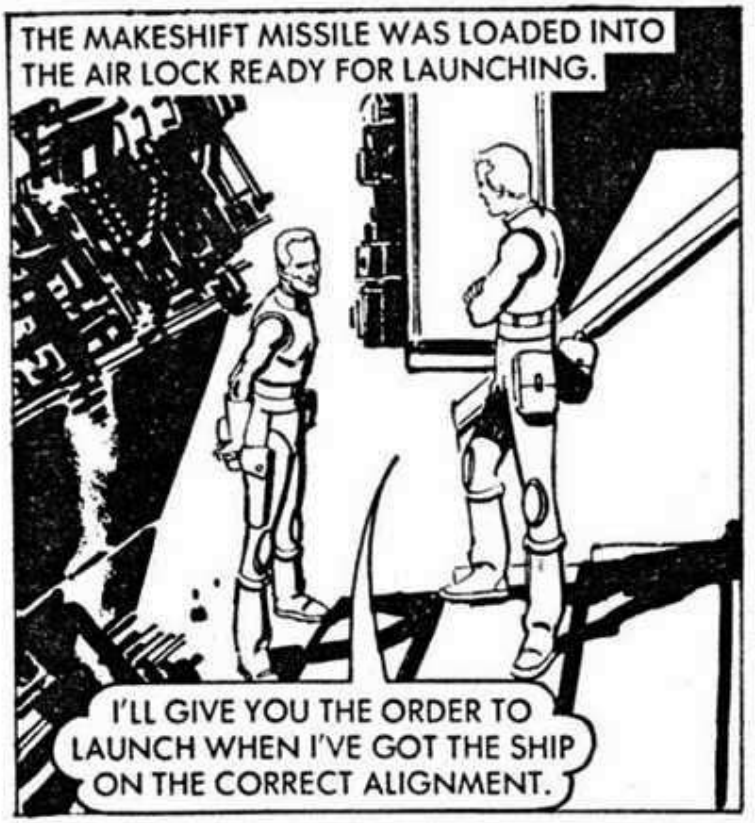
MAGNUS TRANSMITTED TAPES OF ALIEN CALL SIGNS TO KEEP KITORE CONFUSED.
WE HOLD OUR COURSE. REMEMBER, KITORE WANTS THE BATTLECRUISER RANSOM MORE THAN HE WANTS A DEAD PLANET, SO HE'LL ONLY DETONATE THE CAPSULE AS A LAST DESPERATE RESORT.

I'VE GOT A FIX ON THE CAPSULE, LIEUTENANT.
I'LL USE OUR SHIP AS A SHIELD TO STOP HIM DETONATING IT WITH HIS LASER CANNON.
MAGNUS HAD NOTICED FROM THE PICTURES OF THE CAPSULE TRANSMITTED WITH THE RANSOM DEMAND, THAT NO REMOTE CONTROLLED DETONATOR HAD BEEN FITTED TO THE POWER-CORE CAPSULE.

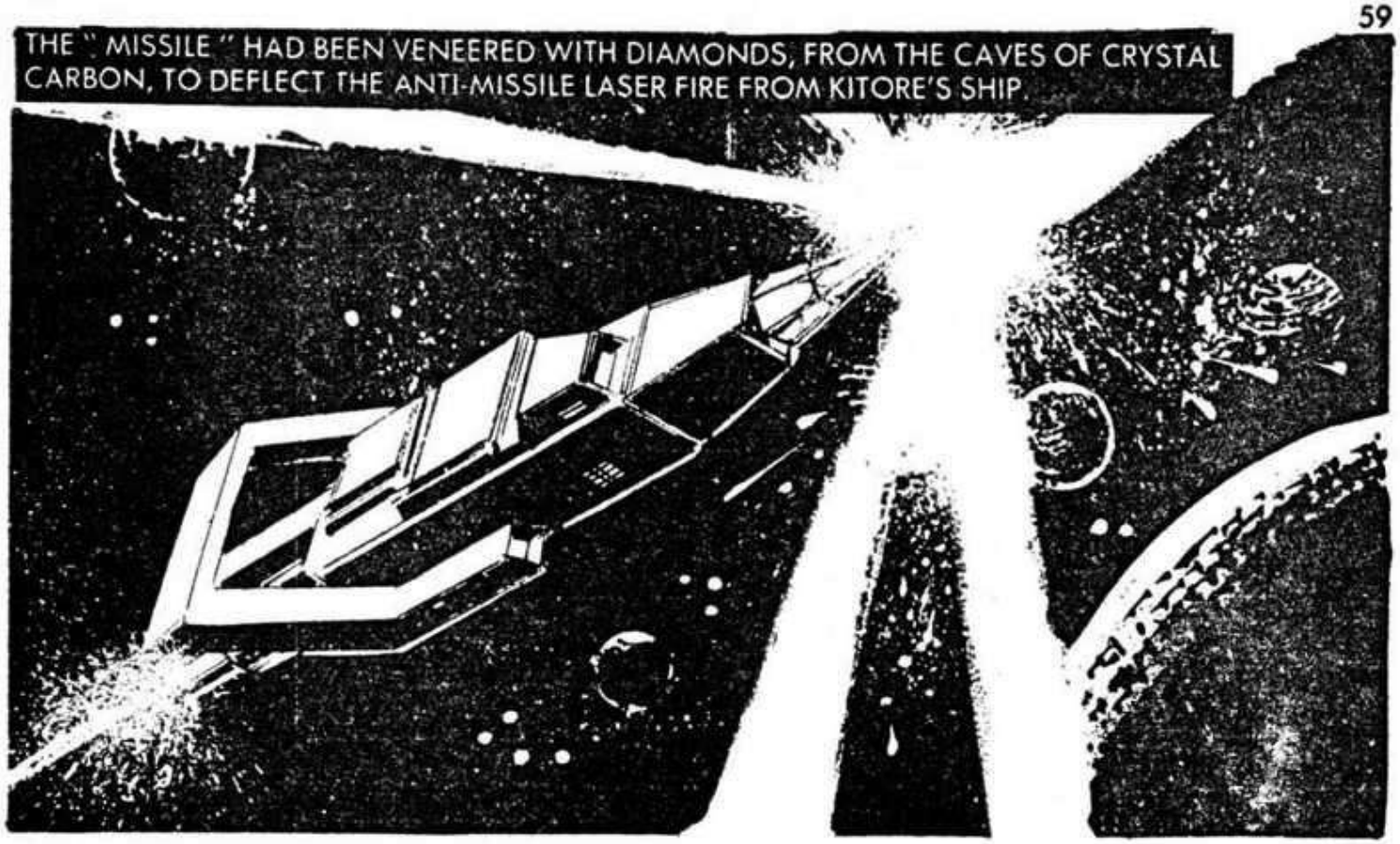
KITORE REALISED HE'D BEEN OUT-MANOEUVRED.
THAT'S NO ALIEN WHO'S LOST HIS WAY! IT'S SOMEBODY WHO KNOWS ABOUT THE POWER-CORE CAPSULE. BLAST HIM OUT OF SPACE WITH OUR LASER CANNON.

I CAN'T SEE ANY WEAPONS ON THE INTRUDER. WE CAN JUST HAMMER AWAY UNTIL THEIR DEFENCE SCREENS ARE OVERLOADED.
MAGNUS HAD BEEN ABLE TO CONSTRUCT A MAKESHIFT MISSILE USING A MEGAMOLE.
IT MAY LOOK CRUDE, BUT IT PACKS THE PUNCH OF 50 LASER CANNON.


I STILL THINK THE GUIDANCE SYSTEM IS TOO CRUDE.
WE'LL FIRE AT POINT BLANK RANGE SO THAT NO IN-FLIGHT COURSE CORRECTIONS WILL BE NEEDED.


THE MAKESHIFT MISSILE WAS LOADED INTO THE AIR LOCK READY FOR LAUNCHING.
I'LL GIVE YOU THE ORDER TO LAUNCH WHEN I'VE GOT THE SHIP ON THE CORRECT ALIGNMENT.

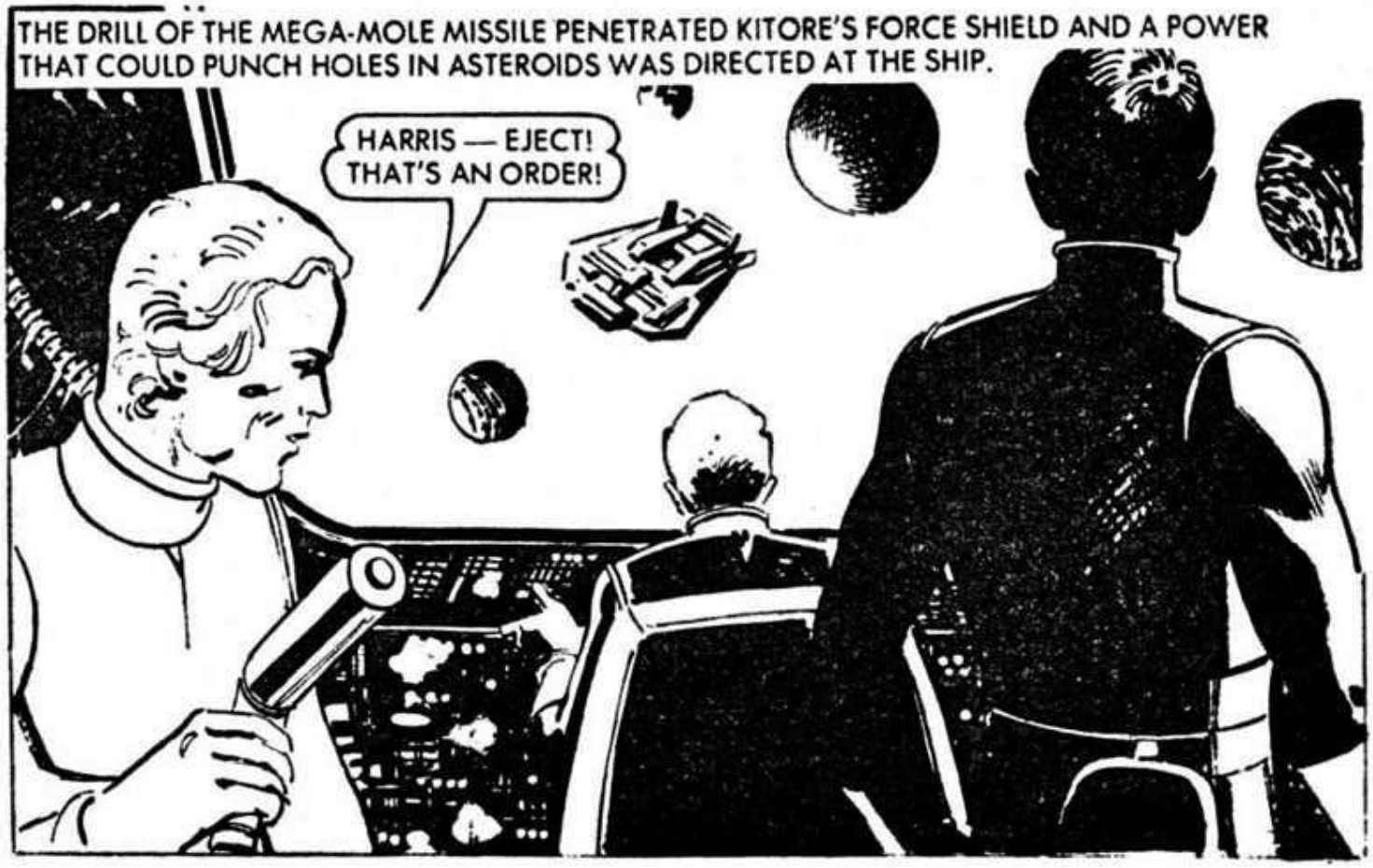
MAGNUS LINED THE AIR-LOCK UP WITH THE BEARING OF KITORE'S SHIP, AND GAVE THE ORDER TO FIRE.
OK, HARRIS, IGNITE THE DRIVE UNIT AND SEND IT ON ITS WAY.


THE " MISSILE " HAD BEEN VENEERED WITH DIAMONDS, FROM THE CAVES OF CRYSTAL CARBON, TO DEFLECT THE ANTI-MISSILE LASER FIRE FROM KITORE'S SHIP.

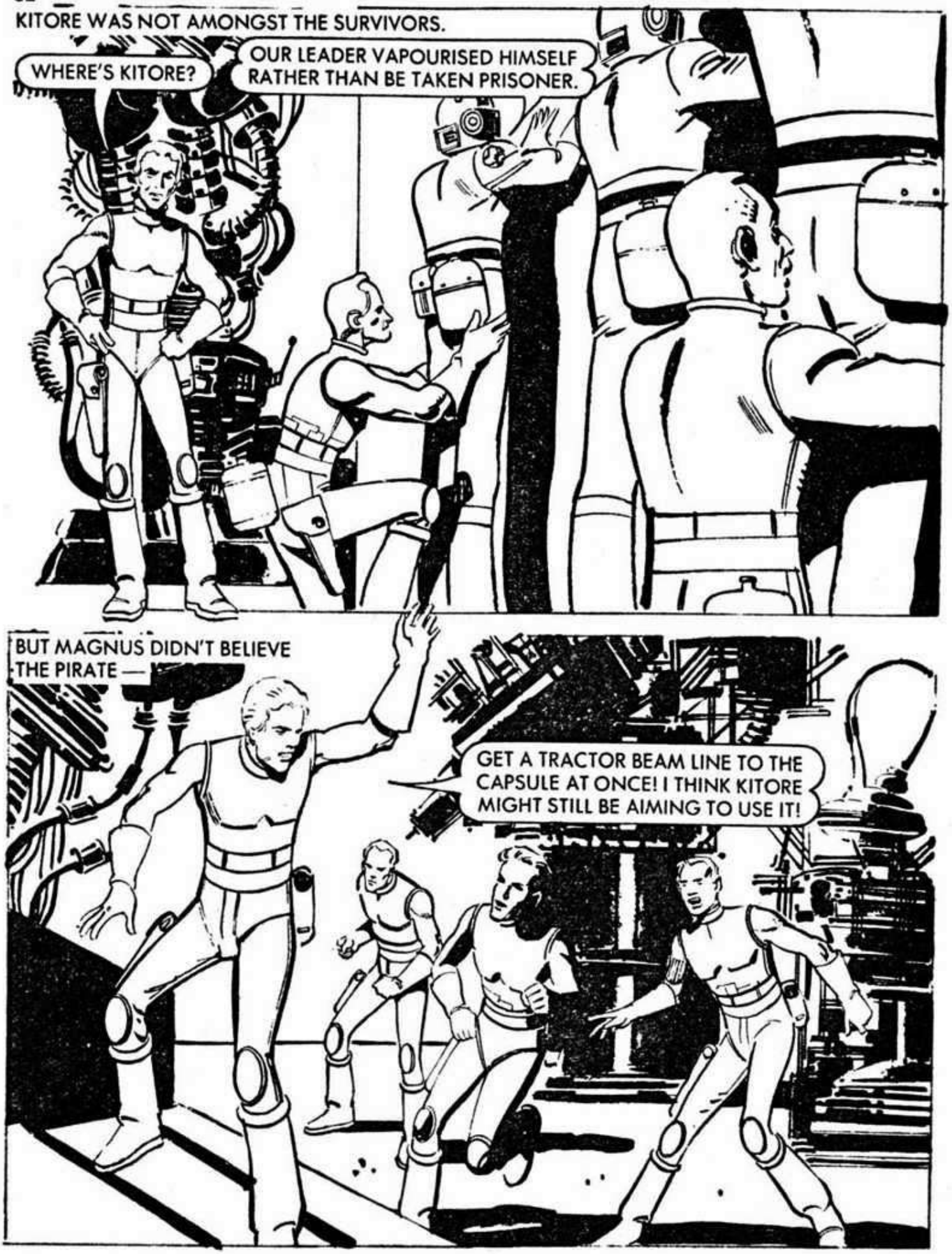
BUT A SECONDARY DEFENCE OF PLASMA BOLTS DIVERTED THE " MISSILE " FROM ITS TARGET.
WE'VE MISSED! I'VE FAILED!

NO, LOOK LIEUTENANT. THE " MISSILE " IS UNDER SOME SORT OF INDEPENDENT CONTROL!

ON BOARD THE MISSILE—
THE GUIDANCE SYSTEM WAS TOO CRUDE, SIR — THIS IS THE ONLY WAY TO HIT THE TARGET.
HARRIS . . .

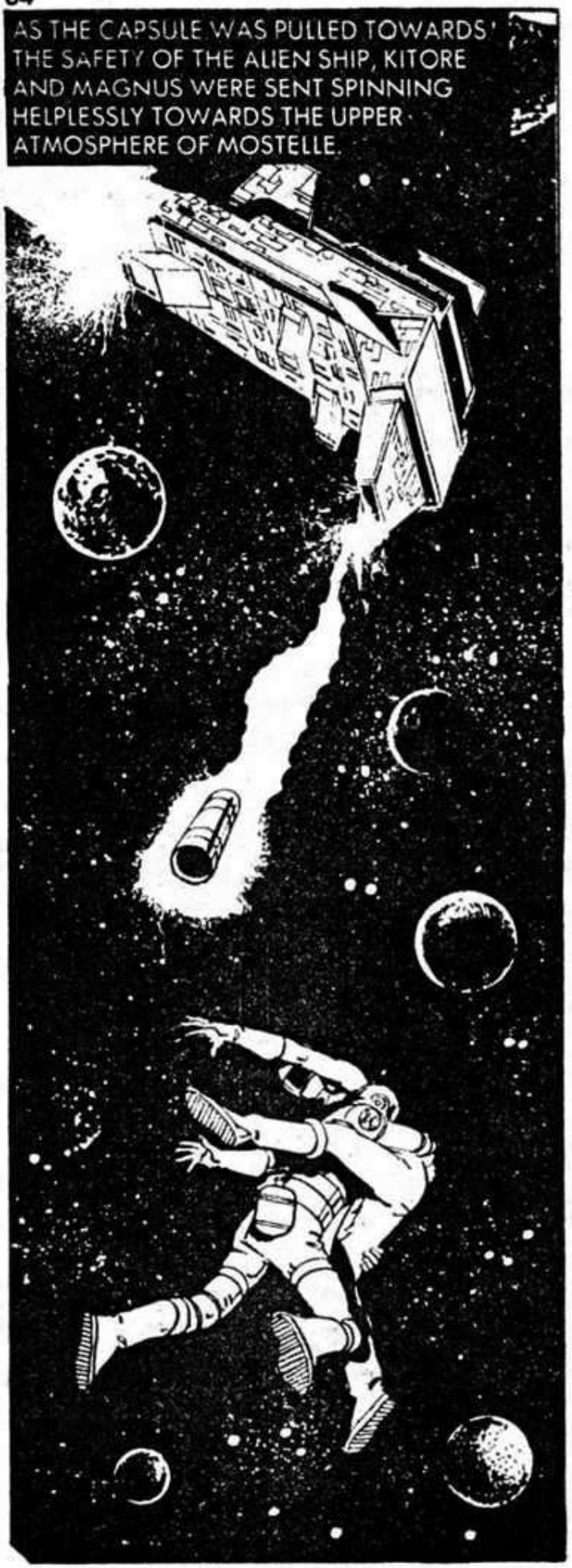

THE DRILL OF THE MEGA-MOLE MISSILE PENETRATED KITORE'S FORCE SHIELD AND A POWER THAT COULD PUNCH HOLES IN ASTEROIDS WAS DIRECTED AT THE SHIP.
HARRIS — EJECT! THAT'S AN ORDER!

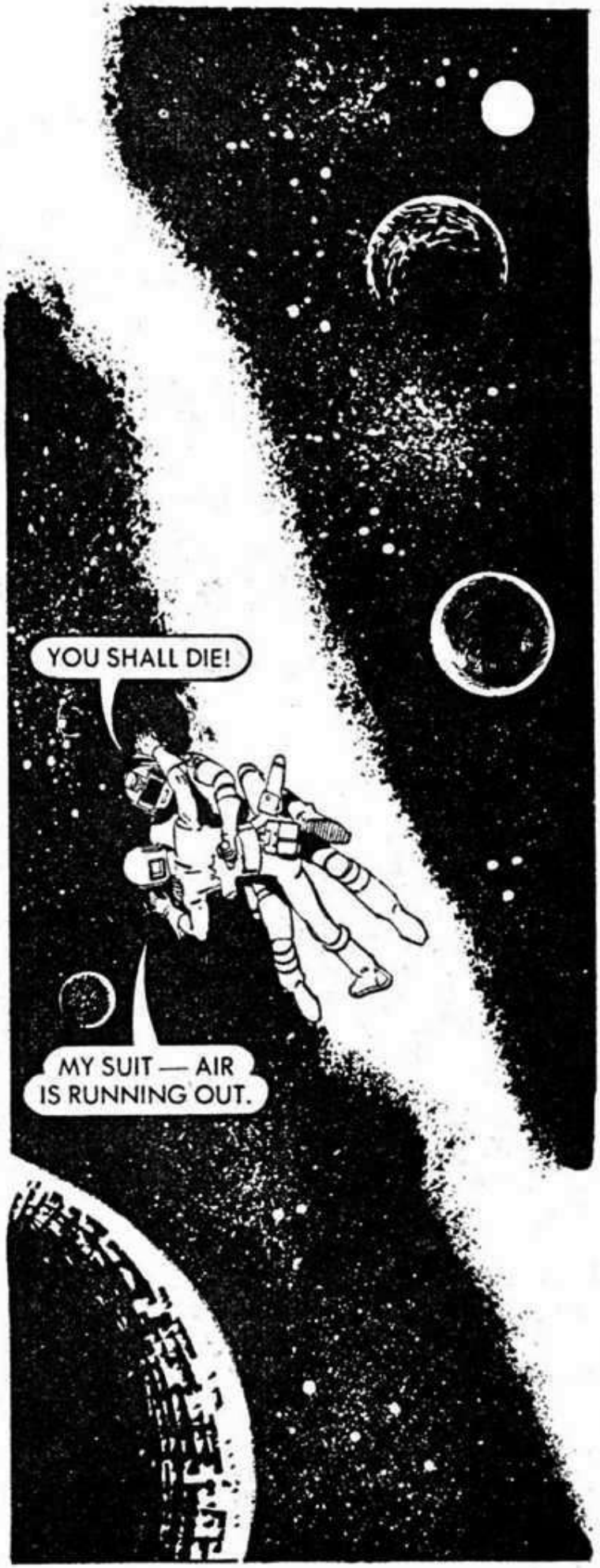
THE MISSILE BLEW—
EITHER HARRIS DIDN'T HEAR YOU SIR, OR HE DIDN'T CHOOSE TO HEAR YOU . . .
GET A TRACTOR BEAM LIFE LINE OUT FOR THE SURVIVORS, BUT WATCH THEM!!

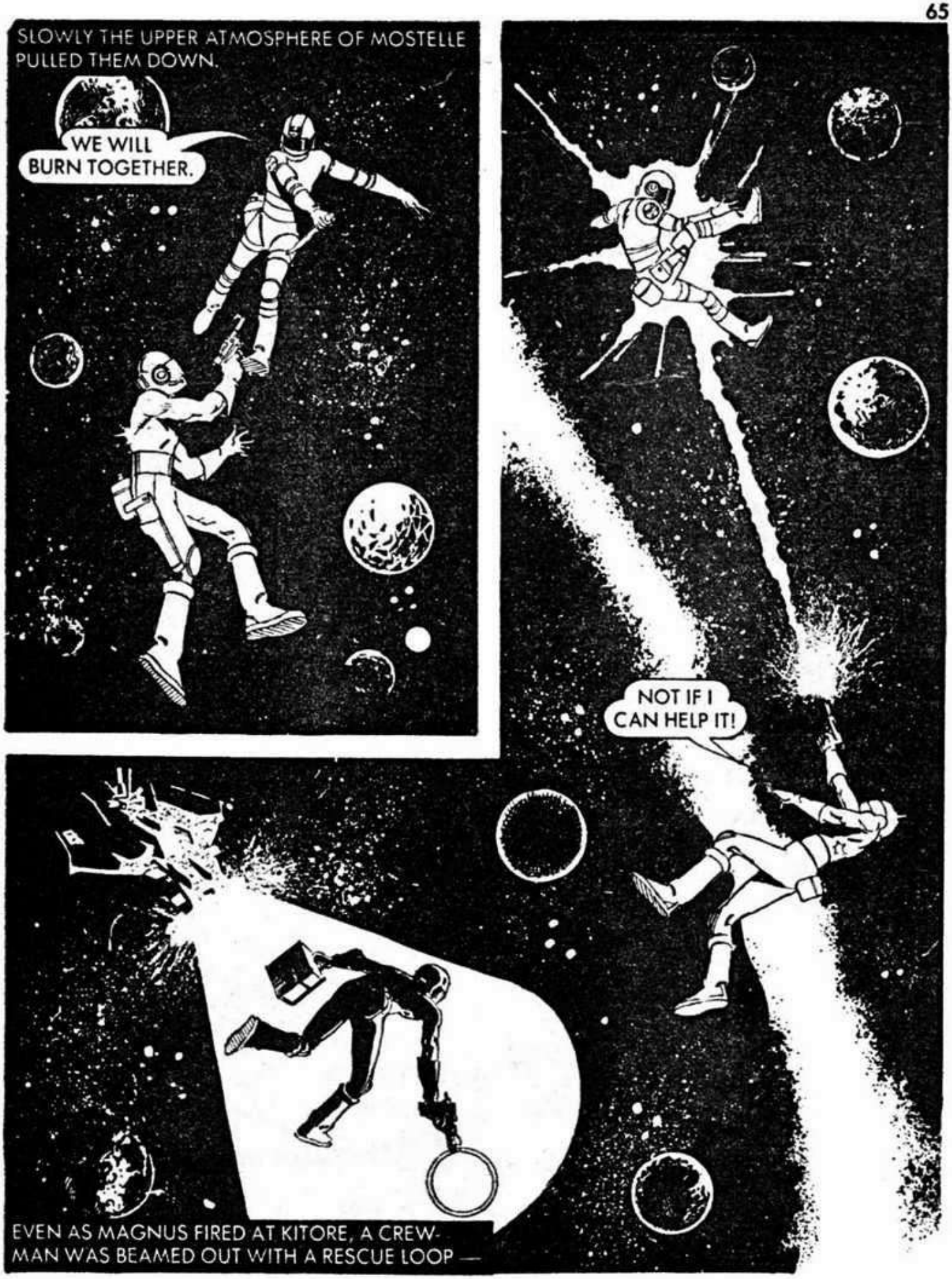

KITORE WAS NOT AMONGST THE SURVIVORS.
WHERE'S KITORE?
OUR LEADER VAPOURISED HIMSELF RATHER THAN BE TAKEN PRISONER.
BUT MAGNUS DIDN'T BELIEVE THE PIRATE —
GET A TRACTOR BEAM LINE TO THE CAPSULE AT ONCE! I THINK KITORE MIGHT STILL BE AIMING TO USE IT!

KITORE WAS AIMING TO CUT OPEN THE CAPSULE AND RELEASE THE LETHAL RADIATION PERSONALLY.
IF I AM TO BE BEATEN, THEN THIS WORLD WILL BE BEATEN WITH ME.

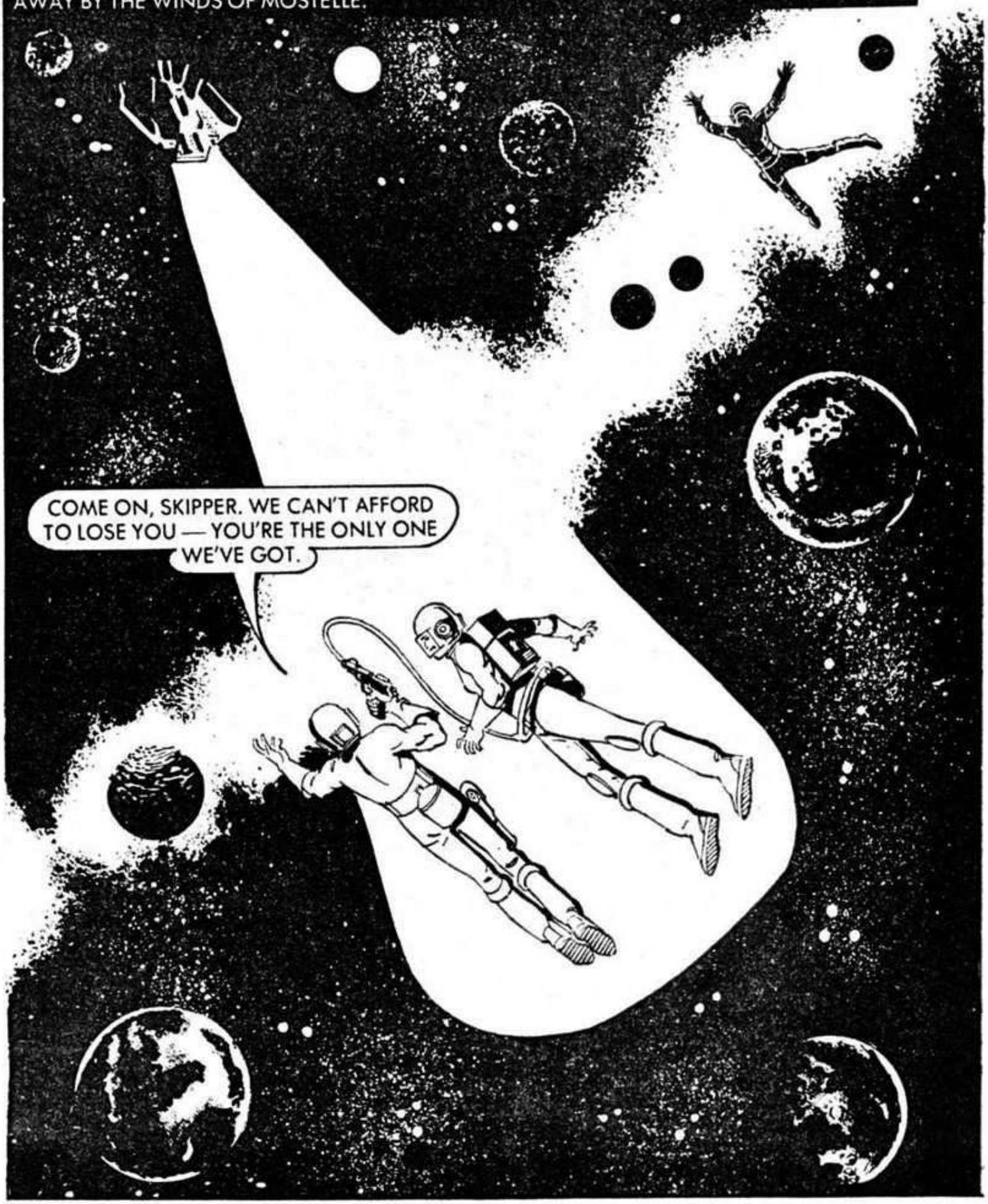
MAGNUS FOUND KITORE AND SPACE-HOPPED TO THE POWER-CORE.


AS THE CAPSULE WAS PULLED TOWARDS THE SAFETY OF THE ALIEN SHIP, KITORE AND MAGNUS WERE SENT SPINNING HELPLESSLY TOWARDS THE UPPER ATMOSPHERE OF MOSTELLE.


YOU SHALL DIE!
MY SUIT — AIR IS RUNNING OUT.


SLOWLY THE UPPER ATMOSPHERE OF MOSTELLE PULLED THEM DOWN.
WE WILL BURN TOGETHER.
NOT IF I CAN HELP IT!
EVEN AS MAGNUS FIRED AT KITORE, A CREWMAN WAS BEAMED OUT WITH A RESCUE LOOP —

THE CREWMAN EXPERTLY LASSOOED MAGNUS, AS THE EVIL OF KITORE WAS BEING BLOWN AWAY BY THE WINDS OF MOSTELLE.



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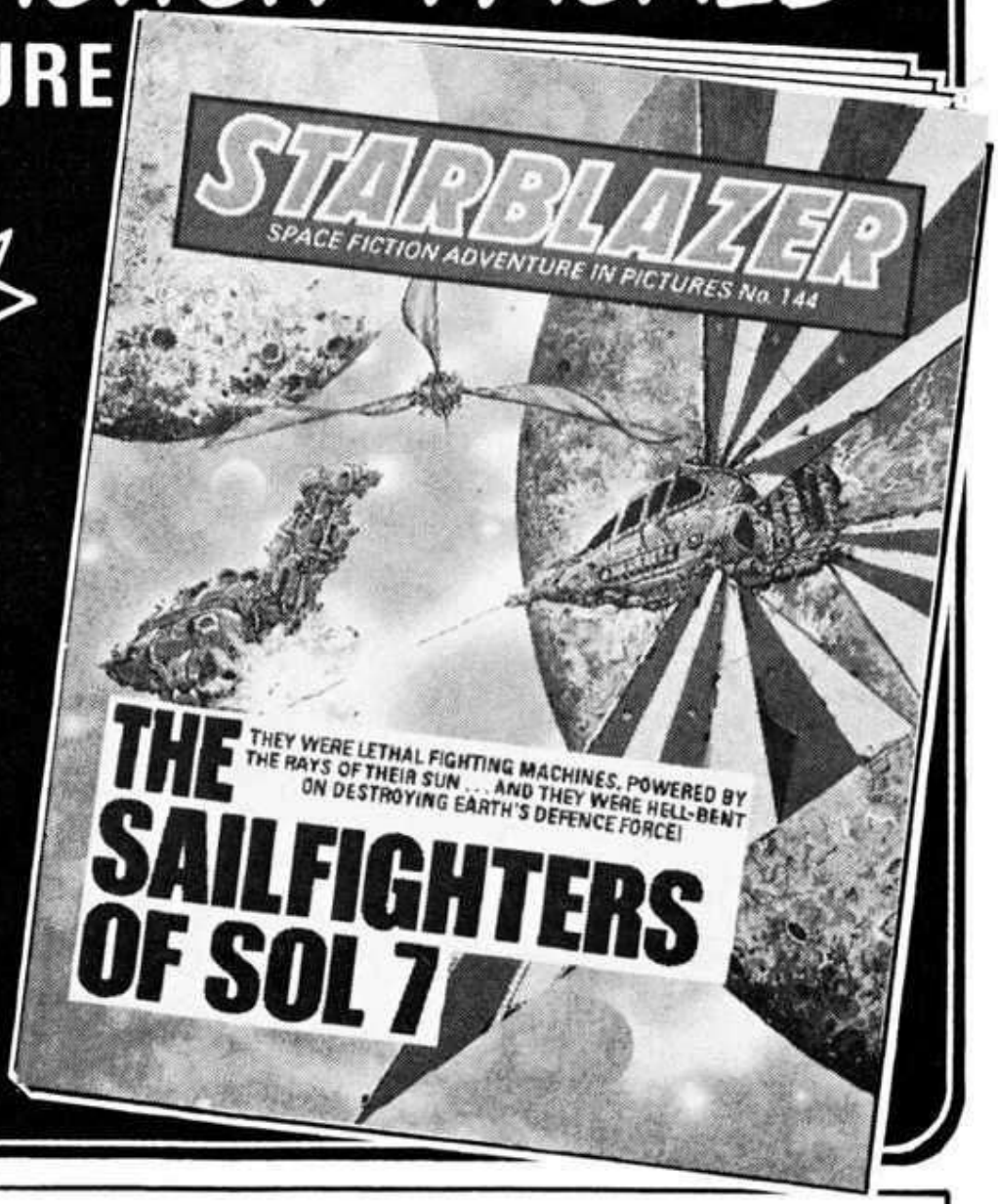

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